



VOICES FROM NICARAGUA

**A U.S.-Based Journal of
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Nicaraguan Women Fighting for Peace

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For Carole Isaacs: Pat Edmunston, Pat Hines, Kate Pravera, Father Bob Stark, Instituto Historico, the women of Ciudad Sandino.

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Learning from Our Compañeras

**Carole Isaacs
Julia Lesage**

Julia: I visited Managua for a month, November, 1981, to teach super-8 filmmaking with the Sandinista labor union, the C.S.T. (Central Sandinista de Trabajadores). A super-8 workshop had been established there with United Nations support. However, because Kodak has a monopoly on super-8 film and developing, the C.S.T. filmmakers had to send their footage to Panama or Mexico for developing, and they faced constant delays before they could edit and show their work. Also, all film had to be imported, so the C.S.T. could not maintain the workshop economically. Now the same group of three young filmmakers have joined together with artists from the Farmworkers Association (A.T.C.) to form a video workshop and consequently have made numerous programs shown on national television. In a sense, I helped out the People's Video Workshop in a transitional period. In technical education, we worked mostly on editing techniques and alternatives to synch sound interviews, such as the use of music, other taped verbal material, and background sound. At the suggestion of Amina Luna, one of the C.S.T. filmmakers, we began filming a project on working women's participation in the revolution, which the group has since completed in video.

For the sake of solidarity work in the U.S., I developed a project of interviewing women during my stay in Nicaragua. My Spanish is fluent, since I had worked in Lima, Peru, from 1967-70 with a Catholic lay organization. Because of my experience in Lima, I knew that the extended family unit forms the focus of Latin American emotional and social life, so it was important for me to live with a family while I was in Managua. To complement the interviews and make a slide show for use in the U.S., I shot 35 mm. slides of daily life in my neighborhood and of women and children working and going to school in Managua's large outdoor market, the Mercado Oriental, where the C.S.T. film group were doing their project about an extraordinary woman activist, Dora, selling tomatoes there.

By chance, during my month in Managua, the C.S.T. was offering a five-day seminar on working women in Latin America. I sat in on that seminar and made friends with the Nicaraguan trade union activists there. We had an intense experience of living together for five days, and I then contacted some of them who worked in Managua for interviews. Ironically, the conference provided an opportunity to interview women from all over Nicaragua, not just from Managua, but the conference organizers had forgotten to bring tapes and a microphone, so I loaned them mine. It was a conference priority to give each woman attending a mimeographed copy of the conference proceeding.

I mention these "hitches," because gathering information in Latin America for publication and solidarity work in the U.S. often goes by an unpredictable route. Phone contact is usually hard to establish and you may not get together with the people you had planned to interview. The best interviews are often gained through a chain of personal contacts. In my case, I chose not to interview the women in the extended family I was staying with so as not to alter the social and affectional relations between us. Furthermore, I did not interview women explicitly opposed to the revolution. There is a certain logic to the interview I did and a certain randomness, and I understand that my month's stay may not have been long enough to go beyond reportage.

Carole: My trip to Nicaragua in February, 1982, came out of my six-month experience doing Central American solidarity work. The structure of doing support work, with its overriding priority of ending U.S. intervention in Central America, made it difficult for me to learn more about the culture and the people whose struggle I was supporting. In our group's ongoing activities, I especially missed any in-depth discussion about Central American women's roles in the revolution and the meaning of revolution in women's lives there. When I went to

Nicaragua, I had a specific goal--to make a slide show about Nicaraguan women which would demonstrate women's day-to-day life in the midst of the revolution.

Before I went, I had only abstract, literary images in my head to describe women's experiences within a revolutionary context. I needed to humanize these models by face-to-face contact with the women who embodied them. I asked myself, "If the Nicaraguan revolution has come from the people, what does that mean in Nicaraguan women's lives." The slide show I would do about Nicaraguan women for U.S. women audiences would broaden our dialogue about cross-cultural feminism here.

While on the solidarity tour to Nicaragua, I had this one specific goal--to focus my photography and interviews on women's experiences. Such a perspective created tensions in the group of solidarity workers I was travelling with. They wanted the slide show to offer a more global picture of the revolution, since they believed that would make the show more "useful" in solidarity work. However, I was and am still committed to my original concept: in communicating Nicaraguan women's concrete experiences, with all its contradictions, we demonstrate how successful the Nicaraguan revolution really is.

In Nicaragua, I faced certain practical obstacles in getting the material I wanted for the slide show. In the first two weeks, our group had many meetings with different Sandinista ministries. Our members all had broad questions to pose, so only a certain small percentage of each interview dealt specifically with women. These interviews established an historical context and gave us a picture of the pre- and post- revolutionary circumstances that affected women's daily life in areas such as education, health, social welfare, agriculture, and religion. However, we faced a severe limitation: only one of our group was bilingual. This made the meetings last a long time, which imposed a further burden on the people being interviewed. Because of the translation process, the roles of interviewer and interviewed remained fairly rigid, with little reciprocity or mutual information sharing.

In contrast, in the last two weeks, I interviewed women individually. People generously took four or five hours out of their already busy day to do this. I found individual women to interview with the help of Father Bob Stark and Kate Pravera, North Americans living and working in Nicaragua. The women I spoke to were mostly community leaders and active participants in both the insurrection and reconstruction. They spoke from an emotional and moral commitment to the full liberation of Nicaraguan men and women, and they all identified the Sandinista government and its program as the best vehicle for advancing this end. Any criticisms they had were

tempered by their overall revolutionary commitment.

All the women I spoke to lived and worked in Managua. The only rural woman I spoke at length to was a farm woman who came to work as a maid in the city. The viewpoints of rural women are underrepresented here. I also did not have an opportunity to interview women who could thoughtfully and responsibly criticize the revolution. Thus, no voices of opposition balance this picture of enthusiastic support.

Our tour's format of meeting with officials encouraged us to ask what I call "percentage questions": How many women participated in ____? What percentage of women did what? The meeting format discouraged personal, emotional, and integrative exchange. A lot of my questions, then, dealt with abortion, militarism, jobs, salaries, and educational opportunities. These questions were shaped by my experiences as a North American feminist working in an autonomous women's movement that contributes to and participates in the seizure of state power.

There is a particular form of women's organizing in Nicaragua. AMLAE supports the Sandinista government, and many high-ranking military and governmental officials are women who helped found that organization. But AMLAE also has its own agenda and perspective on sexual politics. It sets its own policy while supporting the revolution.

Julia: Before I went to Nicaragua, I sent out letters to many U.S. feminists, film scholars, and Latin American studies specialists asking for super-8 equipment, teaching materials, money, and questions to pose to Nicaraguan women. I received a little bit of money and many useful questions. The most valuable questions were these: How do you spend a typical day? Compare and contrast your life as a child with your daughter's (or your life now with your life before, or your life with your mother's). Compare men's lives and attitudes before and after the revolution. How have things changed?

After I came back, I read anthropologist Carol Stack's observer-participant study of how poor black women help each other out in an urban community, and the extended family networks that help them survive. Entitled *All Our Kin*, the book contains the questions Stack used and tells how the people in the community helped her formulate the appropriate issues to ask about. Mostly she gained information by experiencing close, family-like ties herself in that community. I found our methodology quite similar.

In particular, some of the questions that people in the U.S. wanted to know about did not have comparable frames of reference in Nicaragua. I had expected that from my experience in Lima, which had

taught me that there was a different relation between emotional and social life that is characteristic of Latin culture. For example, the personal quality of being "simpatico" reflects a cultural value in which a person is expected to be emotional, to enter into emotional contact with others before s/he gains social respect.

This entry into social understanding through emotional engagement was something which I hoped to achieve by living with a family, and to a large degree I did. I encountered a great strength in women's ties with each other in this middle-class extended family network, where the women had to cope with Nicaragua's economic hardships on a day-to-day level. Four related families lived within two miles of each other, and the women in these families visited each other almost every day. The women had gone to Catholic high schools, and the wife of the house where I lived was a secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Relations. Her mother came to our house every morning to care for the two girls, one age four and the other two months. The young woman considered it a hardship to be daily separated from her infant, but she could not give up her job since legally she had job security only as long as she kept working, and jobs were hard to get. Shortages of white sugar, baby food, and antibiotics were on women's minds, and they were glad that a supermarket was being built in their neighborhood, since they needed convenient shopping. Now the grandmother could only purchase bread or fruits and vegetables from street vendors who stopped by the house every day.

In Nicaragua, the traditional acceptance of women's domestic roles by both men and women changes primarily when women leave the domestic sphere, often at night, to become involved in collective revolutionary work, especially with other women in organizations like the block committees (the C.D.S.). In middle class families, what impels women to participate actively in the revolution? The work week in Nicaragua is 5½ days, which leaves Saturday afternoon for shopping and only Sunday for a family day. The men in my extended family were in study groups at work and active in the army or reserves. The family members all considered themselves Sandinistas, but the men wanted the revolution to become a communist revolution and the women did not. That was an ongoing, lively, and non-antagonistic topic of discussion in my household.

Although more revolutionarily active women, represented in the longer interviews in this magazine, spend much of their time in the militias and mass organizations, the traditional sexual division of labor in the family, as represented by the family I lived with, still reflects the life style of a great number of Sandinista middle class families in Nicaragua. The revolutionary mass organizations have yet to find a way to engage this large group of women, many of whom are forced by economic pressures to work at jobs that



Photo by NICARÁUC

are not as satisfying to them as full-time childrearing would be.

Carole: I heard people speak in a very different context, mostly in meetings where the contact was more reserved and the people interviewed were careful to present the correct line. The domestic workers' union organizers gave us a very free interview, but when we went to the women's organization, AMLAE, the organizers were very guarded because they had a history of talking to foreign feminists and becoming upset by what those women later wrote.

All this changed when we met with women in their houses: Norma, Juanita, Julia, and Marta. By then I had learned to ask open-ended, holistic questions such as, "Describe your life, men's lives, etc., before and after the revolution." Talking to Julia, Juanita, and Marta, we spent the whole afternoon sitting around Julia's house on the bed and on chairs. We talked for two hours, and then the women began to ask questions about the United States. Finally, Julia, who had been sick, working too hard, and depressed at being alone, said, "Well, it's really fine for us all to spend an afternoon talking like this." Even though we had been talking through a translator, I had the sense of a real emotional connection and intellectual exchange.

Julia: I think the people I worked with in the labor union thought less of

me because I was living with a middle class family, even though the employed people in that family were all working for the Sandinista government. Certainly when I visited my co-worker Amina Luna's family and interviewed her mother, Maria Luisa Bermudez, it was in this working class family that I glimpsed what a truly revolutionary transformation of family relations might mean.

Among middle class people I found a healthy suspicion of revolutionary opportunism. They had seen too many men pick up a rock on the day of the triumph and declare, "I'm a Sandinista," and then get a good desk job. In fact, because the revolution so needs middle class people's skills, a bureaucrat might throw in a little extra "I am more Sandinista than thou," and advance rapidly. The women I was living with were both realistic and resentful about that aspect of the revolution.

The standard of living among the salaried middle class in public sector jobs in Managua is not like that of its middle class social counterpart in the U.S. and Europe. None of the houses in this extended family were really finished by our standards. My room had one bare light bulb which I turned on or off by screwing and unscrewing it. In the bathroom, the shower head was broken and I took a shower by filling up a plastic laundry basket in the shower stall with a hose from the patio. Damage done during the fighting was too expensive to repair. I mention these details because few people, when they read or hear in the media about Nicaragua as "supplying arms to revolution in El Salvador," realize how materially poor Nicaragua as an entire country is.

What amazed me was the genuine harmony among the family members I lived with. They enjoyed being together. I heard no fights among them as long as I was there. It was not like middle class family life in the U.S. We would all sit around in what seemed to me to be a crowded living-dining area and watch television after supper, but at any time I or one of the others, including the maid, could go into our rooms and shut the door, with no explanation needed. Everyone accepted the need for privacy.

Carole: I had never even travelled to Mexico. Material conditions in the Third World came as a shock to me. I had seen photographs of South America and had travelled through parts of the rural U.S. South where poverty is intense. But the contrast with what I was used to seeing, the flood of sensations coming from a very different material reality, overwhelmed me. Then I began to notice and be amazed by how people dealt with material scarcity. I began to see all the conserving things people did, especially the women. A tin can was never thrown away, but always made into something. A piece of wood may have had four or five transformations--from part of a wall to a chair seat, or vice

versa. Anything that could be salvaged for another use was saved and used.

While we were talking in her house, Julia showed me the kitchen, which looked like a closet with a few pots hanging on the wall. While standing in that space, I thought about how many people she prepared meals for there every day. Everything connected with family living in Julia's house went on in a very small area, and all activities overlapped. The children played everywhere; a man was sleeping on a cot in the corner; the walls did not connect to the roof, so all the sounds from outside poured in. But I sensed a whole flow and pattern to the overlapping activities there.

In Juanita's house, near Julia's, fifteen people constructed a wonderful life for themselves in a 15' by 50' room, made out of just the bare material bones. Socially, you could see the family units scattered throughout the house and yard. The women cooked in a cooking shed outside. I have thought a lot about this contradiction between these people's rich social relations and minimal living comfort. If I had stayed longer, I would have liked to see how problems were resolved around such issues as working adults getting enough sleep while children were playing all around them. I sensed that the revolution had brought these families tranquility, if not much material gain. With no more political oppression and fear, and with health care and education and the satisfaction of basic needs, interpersonal stress had diminished. Furthermore, mothers changed from thinking of themselves as powerless to understanding their role in constructing a new society. That had happened to these women and had had a positive effect on their families.

Julia: The people I worked with and those I lived with knew I had come down to teach and participate in the revolution. Because of that, they enveloped me with love. When I interviewed women, I felt that not only were they talking about revolution but extending the emotional experience of it to me in a bond of love. In the family I lived with, I was spoiled like a child, especially by the grandmother. When I came home in the afternoon, I'd have a shower, nap, and meal. Somehow whenever I was ready to eat, between noon and 4 p.m., a hot meal would suddenly be set for me on the table. One day I protested in embarrassment about having my clothes laundered and ironed each day. I said that as a teacher, I was used to dressing wrinkled. That became a big joke because the stereotype of the rumpled professor was familiar across national lines.

I found myself very emotionally involved in these interviews and in my trip to Nicaragua. I had just been fired as a university teacher for the third time in four years for being a marxist and feminist, and I had gotten bronchitis from

(CONTINUED ON P.47)

Communism, Religion and War

Norma Galo

After the earthquake in '72, our life was so hard. No international relief aid ever reached me or the people I knew. My husband had gone to the United States to look for work and every now and then he'd send \$50, but with five kids that did not go far. I really hoped he'd stay away because he drank a lot and led a bad life and hit me and the children. His absence didn't matter as long as I was working. But then I had to go to the United States too.

A friend from Miami wrote, "Why don't you come here and work till things in Managua get better." I stayed in Miami seven months but got out as soon as I could, escaping a living death. I came from a country that had just suffered a terrible earthquake, but then I faced other terrible shocks. When I arrived at the Miami airport the immigrations people examined everything in my purse and asked about my plans. When I said I'd just come to visit a friend but they saw I had only cordovas in my purse, the immigrations officials did not believe me. Furthermore, my future employers had not yet arrived, and I would not have recognized them anyway.

Well, I earned \$100 a month and sent it all back to my mother who was taking care of my babies. I worked as a governess taking care of a little girl. My employers were educated but did not know Nicaragua's location and assumed we ran around like savages. One day the man I worked for asked, "Norma, do you like this country? It's so big." I replied, "I really don't know the United States. I got off the plane to come to this house and that's all I've seen. And Nicaragua is as big and rich as any country." He said, "I hear in Nicaragua the natives howl and run around without clothes." I protested, "No, Nicaraguans are civilized and are honorable people." He then said, "But there isn't any food, and a lot of people are dying of hunger." "Yes," I answered, "Nicaraguans need a lot of things. Our people are really aware and our country is rich, but we are dependent on North America. All that we are experiencing at this moment can be traced to imperialism." Then he saw that he wasn't talking to some dumb fool. So he said, "No, it's not the U.S. government that's responsible. It's Somoza." I said, "Look, Somoza is imperialism's biggest friend. Nicaragua's problems are due to the Somoza regime but they have been made worse by gringos manipulating the situation."

From then on he regarded me with suspicion and spied on my every step. I would play with the little

girl I was caring for just as I played with my own kids, and we loved each other a lot. The girl would follow my every step and wanted to know why I would leave when I could get everything I needed there. But I could not stand being treated like an animal or listen to insults about Nicaragua. The family didn't mind when I wanted to return to Nicaragua, and I never heard from them again.

I met many people in the U.S. with fine feelings, but they lived as if disconnected from history. I'd try to pose the question, "Well, where did all this evil come from?" But some of those women lived thinking only about hairdos and manicures. I could not adapt to that kind of life. Even now we have Nicaraguans like that, who just want to travel to the United States to buy up the latest fancy clothes and records and books.

While I was living in the U.S., in my heart and head I was always here, always reflecting on my people's reality. For example, I would look at the food my employers put on the table and what they fed their dogs. They'd cook chicken and debone it, so the dogs wouldn't choke. One day they went on a vacation and told me to fix chicken like that for the dogs. I thought, "Norma, you're making \$100 a month to feed your children, and here they feed dogs like babies. In Latin America, millions of children never have a little piece of chicken, even once a week, nor even a glass of milk." That's when I went back to Managua.

Luckily, back in Managua, a priest came to our neighborhood who fit his parish just like a ring on a finger. He felt uneasy knowing the barbarities all around us, and he and we organized our Christian base community, which he said had to be born from our needs. In fact, we first learned to define our needs. Our people did not know how to speak out in public. It terrified them to stand in the priest's place and read from the Bible. But the priest pushed us to learn to express ourselves, and our Christian base community came to mean for us the most open place, the place where we poor really had a voice. Once we could articulate the extremity of our oppression, we realized we were not doing enough as Christians to fight it.

In those days I had to be both mother and father to my children, friend and comrade. All I had to give was my faith. We worked together as a family in



the Christian base community and discussed many ideas. When we got to the hardest times, the adults learned to their surprise that their children had moved one step beyond them. We had taught them faith but they taught us to combine faith with action.

For example, my youngest was working for the insurrection but I didn't even notice. Even though we were all committed Christians, he'd taken a qualitative step beyond me. First he brought leaflets home to read and hid them under his pillow, but one day I found them. I said then he must always be open and sincere with his mother. When he said he'd allied himself with the Sandinistas, I said I supported their ideas and that we shared the same principles. I knew his moral formation came through his participation in the Christian base community, and when he made this difficult choice, I supported him in it.

Then when he began making contact bombs, he did the same thing--hid them from me. I found the bombs in a cardboard box where he kept his socks. He had not wanted to worry me, he said, because he knew I had already suffered a lot. It was a risk for us all, I said, but if the guardia came, I would think of a ruse to defend us. After all, he still had a child's mind and in these things he needed a mother's experience. I told him that in fighting Somoza, we had to use everyone's accumulated experience, and that at this stage in his life he hadn't had much experience. I hid the bombs in a place my intuition told me was secure, and when my son and his friends needed bombs, they'd tell me and I'd get three or four from that hideaway. My boy was 12 years old then, and we continued to work together.

The young had made their decision and were asking for our support. In our Christian base community we discussed this and sensed we were moving toward a more mature and responsible level in our lives. Nevertheless, some didn't want to take on so dangerous a responsibility. Armed struggle and insurrection against a dictator makes people afraid. But most of us joined our children because we saw that what they wanted from us was just.

We started with street demonstrations, which we organized in all the sectors here. As we saw people being killed, we'd go out in a group and cry, "Too much repression! Down with Somoza's dictatorship!" Bombs would fall on us, and even in a small demonstration, many would often die.

At that point, lots of our members left the Christian base community, saying we'd become more political than religious and they'd rather join the Protest-

ants. Most of us stayed. We knew God had appeared at an historical moment when Roman imperialists were exploiting and killing people in Jerusalem, and Christ always chose to stand with the exploited and oppressed. To be Christian has never meant to live in luxury, for from the moment that we analyze the gospel well, our comfort ends. We follow the poor and exploited and voiceless, and as long as injustice exists, we must make life "uncomfortable" and do so till our last day. We said to those who left that this was why we had to fight, but they did not understand.

After this, we women fought alongside our youth. Our Christianity meant peace, but not a hypocritical peace which conceals crime. When milk prices went up, we could not keep paying the oppressor's prices, and we went out chanting and holding up posters saying, "50¢, no!" We'd take over a church and hang a banner demanding that the dictatorship stop torturing and murdering political prisoners. The guardia would come and break us up, but we old ladies could usually take over four or five blocks. That was a lot.

As women we had to protect our children's lives for we had given them life. After having given them this beautiful gift we had to defend it, to put our lives in danger once again for them just as we had at their birth. Just their youth gave the guardia a pretext to kill them or rape them--girls and boys, too. We could not remain indifferent to that suffering.

Then we saw these things primarily through the Christian base community. Now, after the revolution, we know much more clearly why we do what we do. We know we have to denounce the crimes that threaten the world. To see massacres like those in Guatemala and El Salvador and stand still with our arms crossed would make us accomplices and liars. We must denounce these things even if it's just to four or five people on the corner.

We have begun to critically question the hierarchy and to make the bishops understand that traditional structures must change. We need more than the Mass. We need what will lead us into action. We need to begin to solve the whole planet's problems--for our problems are not only those of Nicaragua alone. We see pain all over the world. In the United States, for example, we see young people's distress as they live in totally divided families. Here, the only division in the revolutionary family is the division of labor. We are all taking responsibility to defend this country and reconstruct it from a truly Christian perspective. We are tilling the land to raise production and struggling against those who won't leave us in peace. But to construct the new Nicaragua, we especially need peace.

It's painful for us now, because the Church hierarchy has turned a deaf ear to the Christian base communities' clamor. That hierarchy rules through the status quo. It does not take into consideration that people live out their lives at the base. We at the base are the Church's concrete exemplar, and Nicaraguans, as Christians, combine it all--love, pain, tears, work, and national defense. We want to live fully as Christians and we demand that the bishops understand what we are doing.

We in the Christian base community have taken this historical step but never knew before that we'd get to this point. In traveling down the road, we learned from experience where to go. We couldn't have done such a thing by decree. We learned from

our children.

Some people here who were never behind the barricades call themselves Sandinistas and Christians. I doubt it. Where were they when our proletarian youth had to get guns and fight? Where were they when we women had to go to the streets to bury the dead, picking up hands and arms and eyes off the ground? Their children spent the insurrection in Europe, not here.

Now such people try to manipulate and distort our faith. They send us a statue of the Madonna which they call "The Virgin Who Sweats." They soaked it in water and froze it, and then brought it out as a miracle. Maybe it's sweating for all the work they didn't do during the fighting and for all they aren't doing which Nicaragua needs now. The counter-revolution is using religion to confuse poor people who have never had any opportunity for education, who couldn't adequately inform themselves about Christianity, society, and intellectual things. At this historical moment, rich Christians should be going along with us so that the whole people would incarnate a liberating God. They should be saying to Nicaragua, "We are all Christians. We share the same faith and the same project of liberation."

Before the insurrection, there were mostly women in our base community and we took the step to organize Nicaraguan women as a whole. Some of our husbands were already in the mountains fighting. Then peasant women came to address us about human rights violations in the North. All Christian base community groups gathered in a church to listen to them. We listened to these women's testimonies about their loved ones' disappearance, torture, and death. Peasants were being buried alive. One mother told how the army tied her son to a tree and poured honey all over him; he was devoured by ants. Then something marvelous happened. As a group we took to the streets, yelling, "Stop the torture. Stop killing our brothers and sisters." We wanted everyone to know about the massacres in the North.

A few days later, women from the Sandinista Front, such as Lea Guido and Gloria Carrillon, invited us to an FSLN meeting. They said we were important and had to take another step, to organize women and prepare for difficult times. It was a real need, beyond just organizing Christians. Two or three women from each Christian base community group started to work with the Sandinista Front, and from this came AMPRONAC.

With the aid of the Sandinistas, we worked on the task most urgent to us--helping our kids. When the time came, we wanted to accompany them and supply food, arms, and first aid. We got totally involved. There was no time for housework. On Wednesdays and Sundays we had meetings and the rest of the week we gathered medicines and made up packets of supplies for the soldiers, so these would be ready when people came in from the mountains. Some fighters who came down had bad diseases, and we bathed and fed and clothed and hid them. It was very risky. Sometimes they'd come running to us with the guardia chasing them and we'd open our doors at once and let them in. Then when the guardia came we women would pick up cans and go out into the streets banging and making noise so as to confuse and disorient the pursuers.

Inside the women's organization, we learned how to do all these kinds of things and more. I was very surprised when they assigned me the task of security--surely only Somoza had security! But the Sandinista Front told me that my job was to organize the neighborhood to protect people's lives. A few of us women organized homes block by block. If there was a

meeting and the guardia found it out, the women would go out and distract the guardia with noise and the young people would go around the side and throw a bomb. The soldiers would run like crazy trying to get away and often would drop their rifles. We'd gather up the rifles then, and I'd hide them inside an old broken stereo console in my house. I had decorated it with flowers and pictures and it made a great hiding place. It was in AMPRONAC that I learned the value of this kind of organization and of responsibly taking a post.

We used the Bible to get us through those times. To console women, Jesus said, "Don't cry for me, women of Jerusalem. Cry for your children." Our women were in despair for ever having given birth, only to see their children delivered up to the guardia. We reinterpreted the Stations of the Cross in terms of images from our own life. The guardia would seize a young man and take him to jail, where they would torture and finally kill him. Then they'd dump his body on the garbage heap outside the city. That was our "Descent from the Cross," our Calvary. In the Stations of the Cross, Veronica wiped Jesus' bleeding face. Our children had their faces disfigured and often when they fell, their faces bled like Christ's. On the Cross, Christ wanted water. Outside my house once, we heard a young man dying on the street and begging for water. It was dawn and we couldn't move. When we got to him he was dead. Our women's hearts stayed with the child who was missing, the child in jail.

We gave the Virgin Mary a whole new image. She had a hard life and she was strong. In spite of the



NORMA GALLO

pain she knew her son had a mission on earth and she stood by him. In the same way we women knew our children had a mission and didn't oppose them. We always shared their struggle.

Socially and personally, we Nicaraguan women here have borne the whole responsibility for our families. For the same social reasons I have talked about, corruption, irresponsibility and machismo have damaged men. Too few men are fully committed to the revolution and their families. Individual men cannot be held completely guilty for what has gone on because they were living in a social structure that left liquor as its only escape. A man might have a miserable salary and maybe a sick family but he could do nothing about it, so instead of giving his wife money to buy medicine, he was encouraged by structures of corruption and despair to drink it up. Now men are more involved in their work and in meetings, as with the CDS. Furthermore, they just cannot do what they want. If they get involved with women and have children, the women can demand their rights and get child support. Men are saying to themselves, "If I have a woman here and a woman there, soon I'll be broke and out in the streets."

Once I took my own husband to the police because he hit me. When he told the police that his father was an army officer, the police locked me in jail instead. He came back to Nicaragua after the triumph but did not want anything to do with the revolution. He said a lot of counterrevolutionary things which shocked me, and when he wanted to move to Leon, our old relation did not matter to me anymore. My kids and I are happy together and we are all part of the revolutionary process. We women have had to learn to stand up for ourselves, and we know the state supports us in this.

People in this neighborhood do revolutionary vigilance with the CDS. They watch what's going on in the streets 24 hours a day. If they see some man hitting a woman, he will go to jail and lose his job, too. In the early days of doing revolutionary vigilance, we did surprise some men hitting their wives and we drove the men out of their houses and to jail. And we taught the women about their rights. Some were farm women who had not learned to read yet and who had been brought to the city by men who wanted a dependent, submissive woman. We'd say to these women, "You can't let yourself be hit because on July 19th we women won our full rights." An incident like this happened right in front of my own house. I grabbed the man by his shirt and stopped him even though he screamed in protest. The police took him to prison. Next day I talked to the woman and said, "Look, this guy's no good for you. He's hit you a lot. You're really young, and you can find another man. This one isn't worth it." Later we found out he had another wife.

This is what we do in the CDS. That's why it's called a defense committee. We see that nobody abuses anyone else and that children have somebody tending them. Before, women had to go out on the streets at night and look for their drunk husbands, leaving the children alone. That does not go on anymore.

It is really important to us that people give testimony about these aspects of Nicaragua's reality abroad. For example, a nun from Costa Rica told us she visited a church there where the bishop was preaching, "Dear God, don't let what's going on in Nicaragua happen here. They say that the CDS and revolutionary vigilance are making people's lives unbearable." In the middle of the sermon, the nun

got up and refuted the bishop's misstatement. Symbolically, it was a powerful act. "Your Excellency," she said, "I have just come back from Nicaragua, and in the experience of our religious sisters there, what you are saying is just not true." "Excuse me, sister," he replied, "I haven't been there and don't know if such reports are true or not." Luckily, she was a really old nun, because if she'd been young, people would've wondered whom she liked in Nicaragua. "Your Excellency," she continued, "I have just come back from Nicaragua. What you say is impossible because I *do* revolutionary vigilance there."

We are trying to eradicate prostitution and have such women integrated into work that really dignifies them. I have a friend working in Leon helping former prostitutes set up a mattress factory. Their testimony would win your heart. At first they didn't want to earn money doing factory work nor be integrated into the revolution. With great warmth and subtlety, my friend would coax them, "Oh, darling, don't say such things. Do not believe you have to put your sweet little body down like that. Work with us. The government is proposing something to you, a new life." Talking like that, she achieved a lot. Some of those women are accountants and secretaries now, and they can manage all aspects of the factory themselves. In December 1982, they took in 80,000 cordovas and spent 40,000 on overhead, which meant 1,000 (\$100) profit for each woman. And they lived collectively and got meals, too, so they had few expenses. It was not easy, but these women really feel part of society now.

The Sandinista government has always foregrounded women's concerns, but not out of generosity. Before, we women were marginalized and used. We won our legitimate place fighting for the revolution. Now the Sandinistas offer women completely the opposite of what Somoza did. It is especially gratifying to see all this public propaganda for women. Before, all around Managua's highways, you'd see billboards of naked women, usually advertising liquor. One of the Sandinistas' first acts was to deal with that offensive advertising--on the streets, on television, or in print--which used women as sex objects. These things exploited bourgeois women, too, and even now such women face exploitation, especially since it's bourgeois men who run around the most; but because those women have their material needs taken care of, they still can escape into some kind of fantasy world. Delinquency and vagrancy have been eliminated, and we all feel a lot more secure, in spite of threats of foreign invasion.

Ours is a tender revolution. It's a really little one, but what I keep seeing here is women's happiness. Women in Nicaragua used to be exploited and tortured, not just by the dictatorship but by their very home life, in which they lived like a slave or were hit or did not have enough money for food. Now men are thinking about these things and standing by their families more. Men and women see that the lives we lived under Somoza did not benefit us in any way. There's a whole new panorama to our and our children's lives that we are beginning to glimpse as we are living out things in a new way.

I haven't studied a lot but I think all revolutions are different and must be so. The Cuban revolution came some seventy years after the Russian revolution and so could not copy that. Vietnam stands at too distant a cultural trajectory from us for us to imitate them. We have to move within our own originality. It's in our revolution that faith has been born, a whole new country which has faith. So we have to integrate the revolution well with the things

of faith--not to divide that faith but to enrich it, so that we can move forward.

If people say they don't believe in God yet do good things, they're on a good path. As God says, we judge the tree by its fruit. On the last day, He's not going to ask, "Did you believe?" but "What did you do? Did you care for your brothers and sisters? Did you help prisoners? Did you fight for justice?"

Remember the story about the man who fell among thieves? A legalistic priest passed by and wouldn't even look his way. He just lay there till a samaritan came along and helped him. Yet the samaritans were hated by the Jews and there just wasn't room for them in that society. In our tradition, they'd occupy the same social position as atheists. What Christ was saying was that to label a person is misleading. We have to look at a person's deeds. Also, we must not kid ourselves and must examine our own acts: "What am I doing? What should I do?" When we extend our hands to each other, that's how we demonstrate Christianity. For God, well, you really can't do anything.

It's a trap to say this one's an atheist, that one's a Marxist, that one's a feminist. People are asking, "With all this communism around, as Christians, what are we supposed to do?" I say, "If we're Christians, we just keep on doing good things, and if we see good things in communism, we do those, too." It's when I see capitalism's empowering armies to kill people in El Salvador and Guatemala or promoting drugs and all kinds of vices that I have to ask "What should we Christians do?" We are called to get socially involved--not just go to Mass--and this challenge will last throughout our lives. The Sandinis-

tas have set an example for us. When they called out, "Patria libre or morir," (Free country or death), as Christians we responded, "Look at how they'll give of themselves, to the ultimate consequence." To me, this example means that if we cannot stake our lives and just want a sedentary religion, we're not Christians. And I've learned that through coming to political consciousness and from my accumulated experience in life.

In fact, this same example lets us see the Communist Party's (CUS) defect. When the insurrection started, the CUS stayed in the realm of pure theory, quoting Marx and Lenin and a whole lot of bullshit. Not the Sandinistas. They did concrete things. They said that to throw out the Somoza dictatorship, we'd have to invent creative ways to fight. We went about learning the kinds of things we could do. The Sandinista Front has always listened to what the people thought--what youth thought, what women thought. Not the Communist Party--it stayed in the realm of pure theory and then after the fighting, expected to be the vanguard.

Whatever would be an essential Christianity for Latin America at this historical moment would be the same for North America. We need to proclaim a liberating God. If your faith does not stamp you with the development of your own integrated human personality, then it's oppressive. As real people seeking a way of life within a community, we have to think in concrete terms. Our values have to be seen even in our country's economy. A country that says it is Christian, as does Nicaragua, cannot maintain its way of life on pure air. We have to promote and defend an economy that favors the exploited classes, those who never had anything before. When a country has econ-



"LISTEN, YANKEE. NICARAGUA IS FIGHTING."

omic exploitation, you get a lot of illness and drug addiction, because when people live in despair of ever having anything, that's the way they sometimes respond. With sacrifice and faith, we're determined to gain something for our children. We cannot ignore those who continue to live in opulence, because out of their opulence comes our degradation and misfortune. It's the life which is lived as sacrifice which produces the better fruit.

There's an ingenuousness on the part of North Americans that minimally must become curiosity. Your people have to shake themselves and recognize reality. And you should be ashamed if you stay in ignorance and are Christians at this historical moment. It may

be due to a lack of leadership that your people do not know anything. But when people really do understand how things are, they have to take a stand, to make things clear to others, and to speak out. Then they know they have to meet in groups to think things out together and to take action. It's not like those kinds of groups I saw in the United States where people would go out to a disco together on a Friday night and come back drunk. People in the United States have to be impelled to learn, "This historical moment we're living in is important for us too, because what's happening in those little countries is going to affect what happens here and in all the great powers."

Religion



Photo from NICARÁUAC

I don't know anything about politics. Everybody has a different story. Me, I only trust in God and my family. I sell fruit drinks and pop and can hardly get enough sugar. I'm a religious woman - I belong to the evangelical church. To me, all bosses are the same whether they're Sandinistas or Somozas.

I'm Catholic but I don't go to church very much. I learned from my father not to put much stock in priests.

I went to Maryknoll school and there my favorite teacher was Sister Maura Clark. She left teaching to work in the poorest sections of Managua and that made the Nicaraguan hierarchy turn against her. They wouldn't let her back in the country, after she'd returned home to the United States for a vacation. So she went to El Salvador where the soldiers raped and killed her.

War Heroine

Rosario Rivera

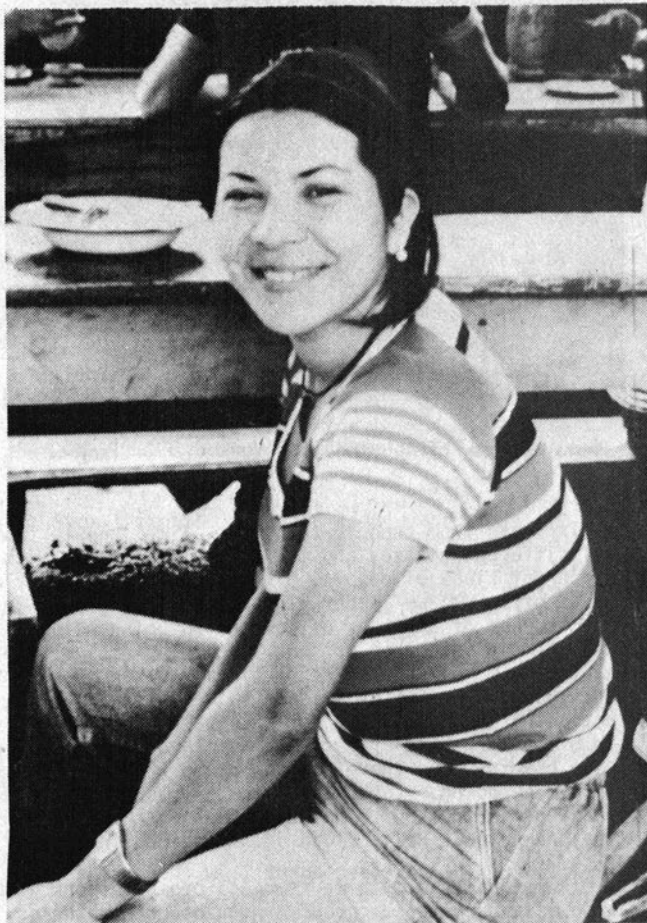
I lived in a little town way up north with my mother and three brothers and sisters. My father separated from us. After I finished six years of primary school, my mother sent me to live with relatives in another city, Nueva Segovia, to go to a public secondary school--it was called Somozan Institute or some name like that. After I got to my third year my mother began having financial difficulty. As the oldest child, I felt responsible, so I switched my own course of study to accounting. To do that, I lived with relatives in the provincial capital of Esteli, where I studied at a private commercial institute for two years. I graduated at age 17 with a certificate as a secretary and accountant and found work right away, but at a very low salary.

As I had planned all along, I worked days and continued my secondary studies at night. That's how I came into contact with revolutionary students. They began to explain to me what the Frente Sandinista was and what a revolutionary movement might mean.

In fact, I always opposed the Somozan regime because that's what I'd learned from my parents. When my father was living with us, he expressed that opposition by supporting the Conservative Party. Somoza ran the Liberal Party, and although the people in the Conservative Party were not really better than Somoza, the head of the Conservative Party had a certain amount of influence over workers who were fed up with so much poverty and repression.

Then, on January 26, 1968, my father was taken prisoner in Managua in a huge confrontation with the guardia, where many students were killed. It seemed like treason to him, and to many workers, because the head of the Conservative Party at that point abandoned the whole community which had placed its confidence in him. Immediately all the political roles began to change, and the Frente Sandinista became the most important focus of opposition to the Somozan regime.

In those years, from 1968 to 1972, people rarely heard about the Sandinista Front for National Liberation. Or they heard the news from the Somoza-owned mass media where the Sandinistas were always labeled pirates or thieves. This was the time that the companeros fighting with the guerrillas in the mountains were striking back at the Somoza regime. In the cities we did not see that kind of fighting and struggle, not even as much social movement. Rather the real blows given Somoza, the real battles, went



ROSARIO RIVERA

on in the mountains and those had almost no publicity. The people didn't really know the degree of armed opposition because of this big cover-up. The official media didn't release details about such fighting or else they would say the government killed so many "bandits" and gave an exaggeratedly high figure of guerrillas killed.

Around 1972, I was working in an office and going to night school at the same time. In the parties my



Photo courtesy of International Women's Film Project

girlfriends from school would give, I met people from all different classes and made a lot of contact with different kinds of people. Then, with a seizure of a house of a Somozan leader, the Frente Sandinista won the freedom of a number of compañeros being held in the Modelo and other prisons, including Daniel Ortega, now a member of the revolutionary government. At that point, some of my friends said to me, "You're not doing anything. Why not integrate yourself fully into the work here? There's a lot to be done for your country, and there's a lot of work that you should be doing. Look at our compañeros who are already defending you. They depend on your activity. They need you. Well, I did it. I joined in 1974.

I went back to my home town and began to work with a Christian community group. With other compañeros, we founded a cooperative for savings and credit, and that's how we involved ourselves with the masses of rural people. One day, one of my fellow workers asked if I was disposed to work with the Frente Sandinista. I said yes, of course. He said he'd like to introduce me to a group of compañeros who were the ones I had really always wanted to know, the ones that had to hide in the mountains.

We began to collaborate with the Frente more directly: we acted as couriers, transferring information and providing information about people who might be able to give assistance. We built support among the farmers and the peasant communities. And

we established safe houses. We set up a support network in the whole county, including other little towns near there, and began to work raising many people's political consciousness with a military instructor from the Frente. At night in some gulleys, we started in physical military training. We learned how to take care of a rifle and clean it and to bear arms, as well as to use larger millimeter guns. Both men and women did this.

At that time when people came to town, basically the only house that met the prerequisites for a safe house was my own. Since my mother never knew what was going on, I had to introduce compañeros to her as a delegation from Managua who had come to instruct us about how to set up credit unions. However, these compañeros wouldn't go out during the day but only at night. So my mother began to be suspicious and ask questions. One day when we all went to a party, one of our group said he'd follow us later and that he would tell my mother that he was a Sandinista. She got really fearful because the repression was so great at that time. She said, "They probably will kill us all." He said, "Yes, that's true. If they catch us, we run the risk of killing everybody in the house." Nevertheless, she gave her blessing and good will to all of us, and she continued to collaborate.

In reality, we didn't exert such a big effort to win her trust. She had always opposed Somoza. We said, "Look, you just can't get rid of Somoza and put in another person as president. There have to be much more profound changes--economic, social, and, above all, political." We gave as an example the poverty of the farmers around us, that marginalizing of the whole working class which existed at that time. It was done by the rich people, the bourgeoisie, the capitalists. We had no health rights, and if a person weren't rich they couldn't study. Really, we had no right to education. Furthermore, we had to live with a culture produced by imperialism, a culture structured to benefit the dominant class's interests. We were talking about these issues all the time among ordinary people, raising political consciousness. In the case of my mother, we achieved a mother who actually praised us and said that what we were doing was really just, that we were asking people to respond to really objective questions. Basically, that's the work I and my compañeros were doing everywhere, in the town and in the country.

From the nucleus of my family, we built up a huge group of collaborators, especially among the farmers. But then one of my uncles who had collaborated fell prisoner. We had to stop our activities for a while, so as to be on the alert and plan things well because at any given moment they could seize us too. We hid ourselves for two weeks right there in the town. Nothing happened. That allowed the guardia to detect that I, at least, and some of the others hadn't been there for two weeks, and that it was suspiciously calm. My mother said I was in Managua taking a course, but it seems that the news filtered back to them.

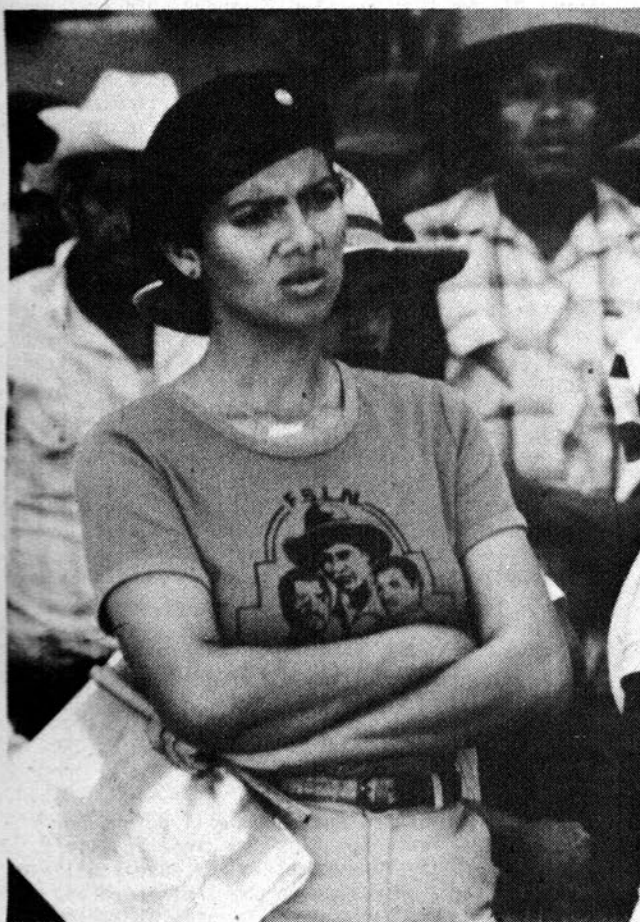
Because of our own lack of experience, once everything was calm, we kept on working as before. Then, bang, we were taken prisoner. All of us, and they tortured us. It was their normal policy: seize people and then torture them so they'd speak. We had agreed beforehand to give the names of about 10 or 12 people who were the most likely to be able to defend themselves or had already left after we had been taken prisoner. Or those whose names wouldn't cause the organization any greater damage. Our story was cohesive and we maintained a firm position. We gave false information or the names of compañeros who'd

already sought refuge so we wouldn't break up completely the collaboration network we'd built up there.

Five women and six men fell prisoner. Of the women they only took me to what they called at that time the "model" prison. Presumably that meant I would be condemned because I would be tried in a war court. They let the other women free. According to them, I was the dangerous one who made the contacts and built up the group with the male compañeros, that we were the ones who formed a Frente cell.

I was kept prisoner there for about a year. I wasn't raped, but I was tortured with electricity. And I was beaten up--my jaw was broken. Once they tied me up nude out in the yard. A dog came around and jumped up on me. I thought it was trained to rape, but it only pissed on my leg, and I was greatly relieved.

I was released in December '76 partly because of human rights issues raised by AMPRONAC--an organization formed by revolutionary women who wanted to diffuse information about the Frente and the revolutionary struggle among the women. They planned demonstrations and conducted strikes to improve the conditions for us who were in prison. Because of that pressure and their human rights protests, I was released. When I got out, I understood for the first time the really substantial work these organized women had undertaken, and we kept on collaborating together until July 19 and the victory. Even though I didn't go with gun in hand to the war front, I consider myself a combatant. I really gave my all to the struggle.



Right now, I'm an accountant with the National Government and an activist in my union. We women are in training in the militias. If we were ready to give our lives to fight Somoza, we have more cause to feel that way now that we're living in liberty, a liberty which cost us so much blood and imprisonment. And we're also not going to let production fall, no matter how much we are pressured by U.S. economic and military aggression. We know what our revolutionary example stands for. As more revolutions are waged in Latin America, ordinary people gain a lot of courage and inspiration as they see this great difference between the capitalist and socialist countries on this continent. One of the major tactics of U.S. imperialism is to maintain a dictatorship militarily so as to support the U.S.'s own interests. But both we and our government know that each step toward liberation taken in any Latin American country constantly makes imperialism lose more and more ground.

When I got out of prison, I rebuilt my life. It's not been easy. I married and had two children, and am now divorced. Right now, I'm sharing a house in Managua with two other single mothers, an arrangement which is highly unusual here and which is accepted only because of the acute housing shortage we face. When I got out of prison, I talked with psychiatrist friends who had also been imprisoned and they helped me a lot. "Look, Rosario," they said, "you can put the past behind you. Draw the good things from your experiences, and go on to construct your whole life."

That's what I'm doing. It's as our leaders say, "To be a Sandinista, you work at it 24 hours a day, until you fall asleep." At home, I'm teaching my children to be committed, too. For example, my four-year-old boy is learning to share domestic tasks. He'll take off his underwear and say, "Mother, I'm going to go wash out my socks and pants." He'll get the plates from the table for me and would wash them, but then I'd have to wash them again.

Even though he's just a little boy, he's really intelligent. He already knows a lot of capitals. When you ask him what's the capital of the United States, he says, "Washington, and that's where the son-of-a-bitch Ronald Reagan lives, who's taking the bread from our mouths, and who wants to kill us all." Look, our children have our example. When I explain to my boy what social changes are taking place, I tell him what it was like during the Somoza regime and what it's like to live in the revolution. This kid is 100% Sandinista. What else could he be with his father and his mother and all of his family involved in the revolution?

I think kids will think differently about love, because we were all bound to tradition before, or certain customs which, in fact, favored capitalism. Ideas were manipulated in our minds, especially the word society. They said you had to get married because of society, that you couldn't just live together. Times are changing so rapidly here. To the degree that we gain more understanding about human relations, I think the next generation will have evolved a lot in their attitudes toward love. For example, I can't imagine a reactionary person and a revolutionary one living together happily. They'd always have conflicts, and their union just wouldn't work out. Two people in love have to maintain a relationship in every way.



Comandante Dora Maria Tellez. Still from the 1980 documentary film, *WOMEN IN ARMS, THE NICARAGUAN CASE* by Victoria Schultz, dist. Hudson River Productions, PO Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417.

Beating of Shadows

Rosario Murillo, to Gioconda

I think of the eyes we have nailed
for a bright star's promise
and the stubborn way
we've talked of perfect times,
strange and blind in the midst of the night
we kept on scraping at the silence.
We have lullabyed this different future
loving and securing it
loving and cradling it
singing good mornings at the threshold of the door,
still dusty, our hands dirty, the words still sad
our backs bent under a cape of night
we harshly insisted on possessing the future.
The revolution is an act of daily magic
an armed woman on night watch
a cry on a wall, as naked as a knife
as solid as hope.

We who have talked
of mirror signals aimed at the sun
of everlasting marvels, of constant miracles
let's go to the center of the world,
let's fabricate large, unknown futures. ●

The older women in the reserves excel the most.
They refuse to be left behind. In my unit a 50-some-
year-old woman never gets sick and never seems to
feel exhausted. She's my model.

Sure, women in the United States wouldn't want to
join the army. They know they'd be joining the army of
an oppressor.

If the United States invades, we'll defend our-
selves until the last one of us has died. You'll
have to come and govern a cemetery, because you'll
have to kill every one of us to come into our
country. ●

War

When the planes would come at us, we'd run away from our little farm and up the mountainside. My young son would be screaming and my daughter-in-law would be throwing herself down on the road and crying that she couldn't go on. In the mountains we had no food and were caught in huge downpours of rain. Clouds of mosquitos bit us. Finally, we stopped running away when the planes would come to attack us. I'd just stay at home but I'd take the kids outside to hide under the largest palm leaves.

My 53 year-old brother heard that his neighbors had denounced him. He went out into the street so the Guardia wouldn't attack his family. When the soldiers shot him through the back, his guts spurted out. His two married daughters had to drag his corpse into the house. That drove them both insane. One of them has never recovered. The other one became an alcoholic. She had a car accident and had to have extensive surgery. This acted like shock therapy and brought her back to her senses. She's holding down a full-time job now.

I lost my father and the man I loved just shortly before the triumph. My father had been a friend and really understood me. My lover fell fighting. I didn't feel any emotions after their deaths but just kept working. About two months later, I started to cry all the time. Friends told me, "Look this is your reality. Your lover fell. You have work to do. Take what you can from your memories of him that are good. You have to build your own life from now on." And now I can talk to anybody about what happened - especially to my landlady. I've told her everything. About how my lover died, about how his body was picked up, and how we buried him. I can talk about all this with a great deal of naturalness.

We ran out of bedsheets. When young people were murdered in the streets outside our houses, we could not just bury them in the bare earth. So we wrapped the bodies up in our sheets.

We were one of the only families that didn't flee when the fighting came to this neighborhood. We stayed locked up in the house and slept under the tables at night with sandbags all around us. I shouldn't say slept: we would be awake almost all night making sure the children didn't cry. The Guardia would listen for the sound of children crying and then fire into the houses. We got even with them though. In the last days, when they were on the run, we stayed up all night banging pots and pans. We made as much noise as we could - then it was their turn not to sleep.

Three months before the triumph, we never knew when we would see victory. We saw lots of our loved ones die. I said to myself, "Look, Myra, you'll either see the triumph or you'll be dead; so don't keep worrying about it."

In the university we'd make straw men and fill them with bombs. We'd burn them in front of the barracks. More women in the university got involved than men did. Especially those of us who had come from the north and had seen so much bloodshed. We secretly passed out political pamphlets. If the Guardia caught any of us we might be cruelly raped or murdered. We always lived with this fear.

I was eating at a restaurant with a Salvadoran friend. When a policeman came in, she jumped up and screamed loudly, "Oh, it's the Guardia." I said to her, "No, you're in Nicaragua now. The soldiers and the police will never molest the people."

Improving Everyone's Health

**Marta Arontegui
Juanita
Julia Garcia**

Marta, Juanita and Julia are three friends who live in Ciudad Sandino. They fought and worked together in the insurrection. Now they are involved in health care and their block committees(CDS).

MARTA: My mother was the first in our family to join the revolution. She had fought with Sandino when she was an unmarried teenager, making tortillas for his forces in the mountains. When all Sandino's soldiers fell in battle or were dispersed, she no longer had an opportunity to fight. But in 1976, when the struggle became strong again, she was the first woman in Ciudad Sandino, this poor district of 60,000 inhabitants, to join AMPRONAC. She'd also been active in the 1970's in the Christian base community, which early on took on a leadership role here. She clearly understood the historical

trajectory of the revolution.

In AMPRONAC, my mother's job was to raise women's consciousness and she did this by visiting women house to house. She also took on the task of politicizing us and our neighbors and friends. Soon all eight in our family were in struggle. My brothers went into clandestine activity and could hardly ever return home. The rest of us worked in the neighborhood. We prepared materials for the fighting and maintained a safe house.

In 1976, I became a nurse and in 1978 I joined AMPRONAC. In my house, I ran a nursing station where we treated wounded guerrillas. Sometimes we had to take them secretly elsewhere for further treatment. Neighbors came who needed health care and medicine. I was the one responsible for health care in Ciudad Sandino during the insurrection.

Now our families share a great bond of solidarity. Our husbands clearly understand our work's importance and why we as women must participate in the revolution. In the past women lived as if asleep - not noticing things and not knowing anything. Illiteracy kept us from understanding. But once we women understood the importance of our active role in the revolution-- both to overthrow Somoza and to keep waging the struggle now -- then our husbands had to learn about that too.

JULIA: Our family is all involved in the revolution -- down to the little kids. My boy reads The Barricade everyday to keep himself informed and to understand world opinion about Nicaragua, including the lies told about us. He's in the Sandinista Youth. We feel no problems here, although I know many women must fight against traditional machismo.

Because of the whole system of social relations that burdened us in the past, women stayed confined to the house and had no outside activi-



MARTA

ties. Furthermore, men feared that women would organize only to fight men. Still most men feel that only men can go out whenever and wherever they want. And we know some women are not yet clear about their rights as women. So when women express a desire to go out of the house to participate socially, that can lead to domestic fights and sometimes separation.

We women are stating clearly that we must leave home to get involved in revolutionary activities, not just to wander around looking for a good time. Men can see how we participate in and how much the country needs us for both reconstruction and defense. When we women take up arms in the militia, it's not to go out to combat but to prepare ourselves to fight aggression and defend our own homes. Even the Frente Sandinista has praised women's superior revolutionary participation -- especially in the areas of health care and defense. Men have to learn that we're acting out of a huge commitment to the whole people, not just to the Frente Sandinista. And as women we know we must demonstrate to our children by example what the revolution means.

JUANITA: Machismo is ingrained in men's personality structure. They believe things like, "The more women a man has, the more manly he is." To change such ingrained ideas is an ideological battle extending far beyond just overthrowing Somoza, and it's one of our primary tasks. Capitalism destroyed morality and family relations in every way possible because capitalism mutilated the people's misfortune and ruin. When government officials showed off their many mistresses, poor men

wanted to prove they were somebody by doing the same thing.

MARTA: Those men who have been in the struggle the longest and those in relations with politicized women have changed the most, but those families are worse off where the woman is not yet politicized. "The revolution has stolen my man," such a woman may complain and she may resent her husband's involvement in politics more than his playing around with other women.

JUANITA: I myself separated from my husband over political disagreements because he couldn't stand my being politically involved. Family life in Nicaragua often runs like an oxcart in the country where you may see an old experienced ox being used to train a young one. At first it looks ridiculous to see both oxen pulling in different directions -- but eventually, they learn to pull together.

We have to work to change both men and women -- to change the person her/himself as well as the social structure if we are to effect deeper personal changes. Well, we women knew how to act prudently before and we have to use that prudence even more cleverly now to take on this task. Liberation within the home will free the whole family.

JULIA: My understanding first came through the Christian base community. I learned there that we were born free and had to fight against all obstacles in order to stay that way. We women



JULIA



JUANITA

in that group simultaneously grew personally and politically.

For many years, my husband played an active role as a union organizer but I didn't know it. In 1965, to protect his life, the Frente Sandinista directed him to move to Ciudad Sandino from where we had been living near the highway to Leon. He had started organizing workers in his factory and gotten a strike going. Any agitation then was dangerous, and the minute workers spoke out politically, they got fired. My husband was blacklisted and the Frente delegated him to do community organizing in Ciudad Sandino.

My only frame of reference then was my home, where I took in washing and ironing to make money. I knew my husband left for long periods of time but nothing else. And he could not tell me because of my limited outlook.

In 1977, Marta's mother came to visit me and told me about my husband's political work. She said I needed to understand its importance, but even more than that, that we women needed to organize ourselves to get ready for armed struggle and to be able to carry out any task. I got involved with AMPRONAC, because it especially spoke to women's participation in the revolution. In 1976, AMPRONAC waged a hunger strike and following that we began to examine Ciudad Sandino's specific problems. Wherever we saw the Guardia's brutality, there we were protesting. Then I wanted to know more about what to do when the Guardia came. I feared getting nervous and not doing what was right, and it was important not to sell out our companeros. That kind of support I got from AMPRONAC.

Initially my husband encouraged my growth in political consciousness. He said it would decrease clashes between us and that I would understand him and not think he was messing around. But when we both got involved in clandestine activity, he told me not to leave the children alone so much. In the beginning I could explain my needs and reasons only vaguely. By 1978 after I'd been working politically for over a year, I could explain myself clearly and argue with him about why he could not cut off my political participation and make me stay in the house. I said that both of us had to struggle for our children's future, and that later we would explain to them what this whole fight had been like. I raised his consciousness about this.

My children thought they had been abandoned. At the time, they were aged 3, 4, 6 and 8. They stayed mostly alone, tended by neighbors. My husband went off to the mountains for four years and I worked in Managua, but we had to work clandestinely. At the moment of the triumph, on July 19th, when I left clandestinity, I joyously returned home to explain everything to the children. They cried and cried. I explained that the Guardia might have captured and interrogated or killed them if their parents had been suspected of political activity. I told them what I'd been doing in the zone, and said that now, after throwing out Somoza's dictatorship, we'd have to work even harder. The children understood and accepted that. But it's still an effort to convince

them that we're not robbing them of the complete attention they'd like, because most revolutionary parents - as well as the children themselves when they get politically active -- must spend a lot of time working for the revolution and have little time left at home.

In 1977, as coordinator of this zone, I guaranteed the Frente that we'd organize the women here in Ciudad Sandino. Along with Marta and Juanita, we secretly organized a core group of thirty women in Mangua to set up safe houses, do medical work, and hide the guerrillas. We women did not just fight with guns. We often had more leeway to go out and talk to other women, seek out new safe houses, and do "armed propaganda." This last task meant teaching the people in the neighborhood about armed struggle and organizing them for it. It was the women who were especially anxious to participate.

Now I work as a zonal representative for AMLAE, organizing women into health brigades. I bring a general orientation from the Frente at the departmental level to guarantee that the people will be ready to mobilize themselves for nationally designated days devoted to specific health campaigns or campaigns to clean up and beautify the neighborhoods. After having been in the revolution for five years, I'm glad to be able to return to work in my own neighborhood. And like all of us who've fought for so many years, each day I find myself more and more attracted and committed to that revolution.

JUANITA: It's us politically conscious people who are improving everyone's health. We know we're responsible for that. The Ministry of Health gives us the technical assistance we need. Sometimes the people in the neighborhood initiate health projects; other times we carry out nationally coordinated ones. But we all work as one shoulder pushing the task of health care forward.

The latest project we've undertaken, one initiated by the Ministry of Health, is that of mass vaccinations. For us on the neighborhood level, this means an opportunity to initiate contact with the people who've never come to the clinic as patients. They have superstitious ideas. And they never have had a real reason to have any confidence in doctors. We're teaching them about the health services and how these are for everyone, especially for the poor.

The health care system under Somoza was inadequate or, for the poor, non-existent. After the revolution, most of the doctors left. They were bourgeois and didn't like the new social process. The ones who stayed did so to keep an eye on their property and are not into working hard. We didn't have enough health care for our population's needs and were glad when Cuban doctors came to help us out. These doctors don't proselytize and our people love them. We still have a lot of health problems, especially sick babies with dysentery, because of previous neglect. But at least now we're taking care of the neediest first.

Ciudad Sandino's health center has ten doctors and the whole area has 77 health care workers, including the cleaning staff and technicians at the Center. Before, we only had 4 health workers.

However, people do not yet take full advantage of the services here. Often they think they have to go to Managua for treatment. That's because before just one clinic with one doctor and one nurse was all Ciudad Sandino had. The rest of the health care came from private hospitals or private clinics. Now we want people to have all the health care they need within their own community, so they don't have to travel all over looking for treatment. We depend on this one center now and are fighting to extend and amplify it. We know we can resolve many of the area's health problems by a local effort.

Politically, Ciudad Sandino is divided into nine zones, and the representatives from each zone meet once a week in a local Health Council. That Council works with the Ministry of Health to execute campaigns like vaccinations, and they work with the people on the block level, in the CDS, to delegate tasks. At their weekly meetings, they discuss the area's needs, problems which people or the clinic have and suggestions which come up from people at the base. One of the Health Council's main tasks now is to make people aware of the whole range of new services available at the Clinic.

To demonstrate how the people themselves are creating a new health care system, let me point out how our clinic charges patients. Everyone is supposed to pay 1 cordoba(about\$.20) at the door. CDS representatives, who know people's financial state, collect this token fee. With what we've taken in, we've collected enough to pay for the down payment on two neighboring houses to expand the Center's services. Next week those will be open and staffed with personnel provided by the Ministry of Health, which will also pay the electric bill. It's the organized community and the

revolution that are providing this new kind of health care which transcends anything we ever had before.

MARTA: The Ministry of Health is promoting a program for all pregnant women called the "Healthy Mothers Program," which includes classes on nutritional education, cleanliness and physiology. We and the CDS members, since we're short of health care workers, get out into the neighborhood to encourage all pregnant women to attend. Before, the concept of "healthy pregnancy" did not exist: women did not go to a doctor for prenatal care, nor did they take infants for check-ups. Doctors were for serious illness and babies were, and still often are, delivered by midwives. A lot of miscarriages were due to ignorance.

In the seminars we teach women that they should not have an abortion and take away the right of a child to be born. They learn about family planning and birth control. Sometimes men will not let women use birth control and if the woman does not want to have a child, she won't come here but will go to a woman who does abortions, who is called a "comadrona." Right now we want to re-train and re-educate the comadronas to become midwives and health workers. The comadronas could use their skills to improve our community and add sorely needed workers in health care.

Beyond this, mothers have gained the support of the law, which they never had before. Married and unmarried women are legally equal. And now the father must support all his children even if the mother remarries.



If the children are abused or abandoned, a new project called, "Project Kid," will help them out. For example, children who peddle newspapers will now deliver papers from door to door by subscription, during the day, and learn skills at night. Or if the children are abused or are vagrants, they can stay in the Children's Center for three months and get a basic education and social orientation beyond their previous street life. And their parents will be educated there too.

JULIA: Now all people, especially women and children, must be protected. Rape and the abuse of women was really prevalent in the old regime. Rape often involved incest. Other times, the Guardia raped girls and threatened to kill them if they spoke out. Now we women whose consciousness is raised want to take the message to all women that we have an intrinsic value and cannot be treated as objects. In our clinic we have a case right now of an adolescent woman whose uncle raped her from ages 11 to 15. She's 15 and engaged and is afraid her fiancé will find out she's not a virgin. She was afraid to tell anyone, even her mother. If the case goes to court, the man could get 8 to 15 years in jail.

You have to understand that the extended family provides a kind of support system in that any baby, even one begotten violently, will be welcomed into it. But women were not supposed to and were afraid to speak out about rape before, especially since laws against rape were not enforced. In 1976, a 14 year old girl was posterizing walls with other secondary school children. The poster read, "The coffee bean blight is not Nicaragua's worst enemy. Somoza is." When the Guardia siezed the children, this girl was beaten and raped by four different men. In spite of threats to her life, she endangered herself to give public testimony against Somoza's Guardia -- her story appeared in the documents which Fernando Cardenal presented to the United States

Congress about human rights violations. The girl became pregnant from the rape and was hidden and protected by a wealthy family for nine months. She was anemic and traumatized but had her baby, a little girl, and has three other children now.

JUANITA: We give to our children what we can, but it's not always material things. Now at age 36, I'm doing volunteer work without a salary and that means a sacrifice for my children. I've made them understand that we all share in this revolutionary task. Before, I worked and gave them all that I as a poor woman could. In a sense I'm depriving them now, but it does not weigh on me. We have to make it clear that we must not only give to our family but to everyone. Even if I die, this attitude will remain -- I have enough to give to everyone.

Sometimes when I'm asleep, a person knocks who needs an injection. At once I'm up and ready to help. I couldn't even tell you how much I do in a day. I just do it fully. We really do need a CDI (a state-run childcare center) here in Ciudad Sandino. I'd love to have my children in one for more adequate childcare.

I'm deeply religious, and it's within the revolution that I see our gospel being fulfilled. This revolutionary process is certainly more advantageous to the poor than the system was before. Only now do we have the freedom and capacity to carry out the gospel, to practice it fully and not just to preach it. From my perspective, which is that of a lay person, I think our bishop is wrong. He says he's not "political" and shouldn't be, but really he does play a political role. I differ from him because I know I'm enacting the gospel when I stand at the side of the dispossessed. I can't look to the bourgeoisie. That class has no moral merit. As God said, all merit resides with the poor and the needy and with those who take the poor's side.

Health

A lot of women have to take care of family members with war psychoses. Especially in the North where the repression was so severe, a lot of people went crazy. Children might have seen their parents with their guts hanging out or burned alive or drowned. Combatants who had been fighting ceaselessly often have hallucinations or migraines or, more commonly, just can't sleep at night.

We cannot prove that there is biological warfare. But we are taking measures as if it existed. We go from one epidemic to the next: polio, measles, dengue, and bloody conjunctivitis. AMLAE has organized all the neighborhoods into vaccination campaigns and clean-up projects. We are not only drastically reducing diseases, we are also teaching people how to take care of their health. These campaigns combat counterrevolution, too. People who are sick cannot work or fight.

Secretaries

Mayra Mairena

I'm working in a bank organizing state employees. This revolutionary task seems much harder to me than those we were assigned before the revolution, where we could just carry out specific tasks. I want to convince secretaries here, "Listen, compañera, you're a state employee. You got your job in Somoza's times but you weren't responsible for him. Now you have the chance to transform yourself into a new woman. And because you're a professional, you have a lot more to give the revolution."

As a woman, my revolutionary task is to bring these other women to consciousness. But it's really hard to work here in the financial sector, which historically had been totally corrupt, and where the secretaries still maintain an individualist concept of their social role. Here most of the women earn a good salary, have a car, dress well, and use good makeup. They never felt in their own flesh and blood the kind of repression that the farmers did. Even now, farm women have to plant coffee trees in order to earn something to eat or harvest coffee or cotton. The rural women earn a real low salary and have never had enough money to buy luxury articles.

I'm working with the state employees' union, UNE. We want the women working in this bank to contribute to building a new society. We tell them, "Let's work together to transform everything." But they were often educated in a way that made them consider work as something only to be done for one's own gain. They often reply, "What does this social thing matter to me? Your enthusiasm strikes me as excessive. I'll just work my eight hours and live my own life the rest of the time."

These women reject us because historically they were manipulated. Commonly, to get a job in a place like this, a secretary had to sleep with her boss. That happened in the Somozan era because it was such a privilege to work in a bank. The bank functionaries, the economists, abused the women and made sexual instruments out of them. Such exploitation not only humiliated the women but corrupted their attitudes toward both themselves and other women. A woman might think, "If I go out with the boss, I'll keep my job, whatever happens." And then she didn't see her connection with the other workers here, like the cleaning people and the mechanics, who were the real slaves. She got her job and cultivated a consumer mentality. Here, because of their privileged social environment, women often seemed what we call "plastic," interested in developing only themselves.

In spite of the fact that this sector, the finan-



MAYRA MAIRENA.

cial sector, was so full of these vices, we have accomplished a lot here. Not everybody in this institution ran after the revolution. Only about 7% of our personnel fled the country, those too heavily implicated in Somosismo. The Frente Sandinista understands that a lot of honest and honorable people worked for the dictatorship who just had to find a job. Secretaries or workers who were forced upon demand to vote for Somoza didn't flee; they weren't responsible for him. And the bank really needs the kind of work they can do. The Sandinistas didn't want to throw a lot of people out of their job; that would have been despicable. Beyond that, the revolution has given these workers a lot of new opportunities in a generous way.

Many women here have demonstrated in their practice that they *do* want to contribute to our revolutionary process. They've become affiliated with AMLAI, or UNE, the organization of employees, or the militias. I know we've really achieved a lot because so many have joined the militia--mostly because of the consciousness raising done by the mass organizations. Huge numbers of people who worked for Somoza or the Somozan regime are now in the militias, and you see them here at Thursday afternoon militia practice. Every Thursday, for example, you'll see hundreds of women in this bank in the militias. They worked for Somoza but understand now we're transforming the state.

Organizing in the University

Yolanda Morales

I've been working as a secretary at the National University (UNAN) since age 18. I'm 38 now. Although I had studied all the secretarial skills, I found a low paying job in the university only as a typist, and there I had to sweep, clean and run errands too. In 1962, we secretaries and staff in the university faced a precarious economic situation. We had to earn what we could just to get food, so I took this job and did everything assigned, even cleaning. The staff didn't work 8 hours, but over 12. And often two or three months would pass and nobody got a salary because the government acted so irresponsibly toward public education. But we became loyally attached to the university and worked anyway. We knew that in the long run, with all the fights that we were waging, all the scandals that we were creating, all the trouble we were giving the dictatorship, we'd finally move beyond this situation, and all of us together would receive our salaries. That's the way 17 years just flew by for me.

Before July 19, 1979, the university stood as Nicaragua's liberated territory, in spite of the fact that the army bombed us and the guardia came in here and slaughtered us. The repression became much more intense from 1977 on, but in spite of it we achieved a kind of miracle inside the university and on a national level. Here we never had any problem between faculty and staff. Professors did not consider themselves as elevated above the workers; nor did we feel any paternalism. We all worked together--students, staff, teachers, authorities--as one united group. The harder the guardia knocked us around, the more it built up the unity between all of us here.

In 1971, a group of us set about trying to organize what would be a union. Our mindset then was just oriented to economic things. So in 1971 and '72, we did research into what a union was because we didn't know what a union might do. In 1973, after the earthquake, we in Nicaragua faced an economic crisis that affected every area of our life: it was hard to get housing, food, everything. That's when our union really started to grow in political consciousness, especially when we saw the scandalous robbery of donations sent from abroad, including from the United States. The international support was important, for it acknowledged that Nicaragua had a huge task of reconstruction to accomplish. So our union declared that not only were we university workers bad off, but that the Somoza government was robbing our whole country.

Well, as we went down the road of fighting this union struggle, we learned little by little that there was a more fundamental fight to take on--the struggle of all workers. Here in the university, with support and advice from teachers and students, we in the staff clarified for ourselves what role a union here could assume at this time in history. We organized pretty easily, above all because everybody felt the dictatorship's oppression, an oppression that fell even more heavily on the university. In this manner political consciousness crystallized in both the leaders and the base.

From 1972 to 1978, the union had in it only about 500 workers. At that time, those of us who had developed our political consciousness worked very hard. The others, even though they didn't work hard within the union, still wanted to overthrow the dictatorship and they certainly collaborated with us. We were a mixed group, both men and women, but, to tell the truth, the women bore the brunt of the work, even in the central leadership, setting the political direction of the union. Inside the university union it was we women who assumed leadership. Maybe it was for tactical reasons, a decision made by the Frente Sandinista; maybe they understood that we women were prepared to give everything we could give, until the ultimate consequence.

Finally the moment arrived when this union took on an historical importance on an international level, especially in Central America. We became the vanguard union in regards to politics. We didn't just stay here on this campus. To prepare for the insurrection, our cadre worked in factories and workplaces and went out into neighborhoods, organizing all the workers. Beyond that, we organized the neighborhoods into action committees which today are the revolutionary neighborhood organizations, the CDS. We worked organizing women into AMPRONAC, which is AMLAE today (the prerevolutionary and postrevolutionary women's organizations).

And all this time we were working so that there wouldn't have to be a workers' union and a professors' union. We wanted just one union for all university workers. And next year this goal will be accomplished. And it won't just be in the national university, UNAN, that will be the case in all of the centers for superior education in Nicaragua--one union for all workers in higher education.

During the insurrection, I never bore arms. I have to admit, I was really terrified. Not any longer--because I actually lived through those times in the middle of it all, and because now we've all received militia training. Then, during the final insurrection in Managua, my work was to provide supplies--food and munitions, take care of the wounded, and help build barricades. I feel frustrated in thinking about those times. I really would have wanted to participate to my utmost, even though I might have died. That's why I have entered into the popular militias, because mentally then I couldn't bring myself to participate in the armed struggle.

During the insurrection I helped a woman give birth. We first aid workers had seen a movie about a baby being born and what to do, but I'd never had any similar experience. And with every scream that woman gave, I screamed too. I had had three girls and I know what she was going through. When she cried, I cried. Luckily we both came through well, although I felt I would die since I had suffered her whole labor. And after she had that baby, she stayed here about an hour and a half resting, and then she calmly went off by foot to her own home a couple of miles away in the middle of full bombardment. Our women here are super-strong and super-courageous. That's the biggest problem the counter-revolution will face here. They'll face us, the women.

As a woman doing political organizing, I have encountered many obstacles. Lots of women here have faced these same problems, especially when they've taken on leadership roles. Those of us who are doing the planning have to spend most of our time dedicated to the organization. Before the revolution, however, it was a lot harder. Sometimes I never returned home for a week; at least now I can sleep in my own bed at night.

Before the revolution, men were often less committed than women, because the men had had a whole series of vices inculcated in them by capitalist social structures, advertising, and mass media--vices such as alcoholism, infidelity, and vagrancy. Meanwhile, for us women, perhaps because of our isolation and moral formation within the domestic sphere, the moment came in which the appeal, the call reached us. For us, this came like an escape, a way to see if we could liberate ourselves. However, from the very beginning, from the moment that we founded AMPRONAC, we always understood that the liberation of one woman or of all women could not be accomplished without liberating our country. Well, for that reason, we Nicaraguan women became a flood tide. We were determined to overcome any obstacle that faced us, and insofar as we resolved our country's problems, we would achieve our own liberation. The men, machos that they were, believed then that we were just idealistic.

When I began union organizing and then when I was working for the Frente Sandinista, I was married. But my husband was a super-macho and a super-imbecile. He could only impute to me the most dishonest thing he could think of--not that I had one lover but that I had many. People would often drive me home, and everybody he saw in a car with me he thought was a lover.

In conversations I'd have with my husband, I'd sort of feel him out as to whether I could depend on his support in this. I thought maybe I could find another cadre person in him. But he was a reactionary. I could never tell him, "I'm working with the Sandinistas, and that's the cause of all my absences." Sometimes I had to travel outside of Managua; some-

times I even had to travel outside of the country, but I couldn't tell my husband about it, because I was going in a clandestine way. And if he knew I had been leaving the house with my passport to go abroad, it would have been worse. I'd say to him that I was going to another city and that we were forming a union there.

One day I came home joyously to tell him I was pregnant. It was a great moment because we had been married four years and not able to have a child yet. That's when all our really huge fights started. He said I'd been running around and that the child was not his and that I'd have to get an abortion. I refused and we separated and got divorced.

Such attitudes still influence both men and women who say that the revolution has come to break up marriages. Well, I say the marriages were already breaking up beforehand. Because women were supposed to avoid all such occasions which might be interpreted wrongly and because they were supposed to avoid antagonizing their husbands, women were just supposed to stay in the house cooking and taking care of kids. That's changed a lot now. And our men will have to learn, because if they don't, they'll just die from the ulcers eating away at them from so much fury. They just can't keep us in the house any more. They



YOLANDA MORALES



SHOPPING CENTER IN MANAGUA

Photo by Amina Luna and C.S.T photographers

just can't hold us back.

My husband had worked for a pharmaceutical house, giving doctors all the advertising about new drugs. He still earns a really good salary, but he doesn't give me anything and I don't need it. After we split up, I did not go back to my parents but I stayed living alone in my own house. I had my salary, but the economic crisis had begun and it was hard just to get money to eat. That's when I got the full support of my brothers and sisters and my whole family. They never abandoned me.

I had told my family just that I was working with the union, but they intuitively knew and approved of my political work. I could never unload on them all of the fears and terror I felt. I understood that in my hands resided the wellbeing of my daughter and of my entire family, because when the guardia discovered someone they'd kill everyone in that person's house. If there was a dog in the house, they'd kill it too. Internally, I felt morally uneasy, because I knew that I bore the burden of all my family's lives. I was super-cautious because I knew that the lives of my brothers and sisters depended on it.

My family gave me all their support, all their trust. They never knew I was putting their lives in danger. Now that they do know, they feel very proud of me. They say that if they'd known, they would have even given me more. And now that's what they're doing. They help me out financially by paying my daughters' school tuition. I have three daughters. One is 14, one is 8, and one is 4. Before, because I had a pretty good economic status living with my husband, they were put in private schools from the age of 3 on, Catholic schools. Since I separated from my husband, my daughters have still gone to those Catholic schools. My sisters keep them there.

I'm a Catholic. I believe in God and the saints. Our revolution insists that the people's religious principles be maintained and conserved, but it will give these principles their genuine significance. Because God's will is not that we live as exploited

and oppressed, but that we feel ourselves as sacred.

At the same time that most of us are Catholics here, we understand that U.S. imperialism's bases of support in Latin America are the dictatorships and the religious hierarchies. And we Nicaraguan people are smart enough to see how religion is being manipulated as a diversionary tactic by the counter-revolution.

For example, look at how the CIA supports Protestant sects in our most culturally backward neighborhoods and the poorest areas. Well, first of all, we're not neglecting those sectors and the neighborhood committees are strongest there. Second, people can learn to spot pastors with nice shoes and fancy briefcases who couldn't possibly be living so well off of donations. They don't even have a parish. Who's supporting them?

These groups are trying to distract people from what was really Christ's word--a revolutionary teaching about liberating the poor. They say you have to be submissive and yield to God's will, but they really want to keep Christians in their old fear and passivity, domesticated like slaves and not fully developing themselves. Well, we're watching out that they don't destroy our whole religious set of principles and distort them like they did before.

In terms of education, there's no difference between Catholic and public schools--at all educational levels--because they all have the same curriculum. And in the private schools, like the one my 14-year-old daughter goes to, they are very respectful toward the students' ideology and beliefs. For example, my daughter's an activist in the Sandinista Youth in Assumption School. It's directed by Mrs. Vandana, whose husband went into exile in the United States. He was a businessman who belonged to an organization (COSEP) which was doing counterrevolutionary activity here. In spite of that, this woman just doesn't act negatively toward my daughter nor towards any of the girls who are in the Sandinista Youth. Surely, the principal would not oppose the Ministry of Education's plan of studies. Because the day she did, then the school would be closed and turned over to the state. I don't think any of these private educators want to give up their little business which is their school.

In fact, the girls in the Sandinista Youth have their teachers' respect because those girls think with a real clarity and act with political assurance. They study together in a study circle every day, and they live practically applying their ideas.

My little girls are still young to have a developed political consciousness, but my oldest daughter at age 14 has grasped all I have to teach her. She participated in the literacy campaign and is in the militias. Now when she gets a few days free from school, she goes out to this family she taught literacy to in the country. They're like parents to her. And during her long vacation, she plans to work two months cutting coffee--wants to learn that, she says--and one working in the farm community where she worked before.

My daughter participates in revolutionary activities at the same level I do. She has the maturity of an adult. She got it from her own character and from seeing the work I had to carry on by myself, without any support from her father. Her school principal has commented on her maturity and says she acts as if she were at least 18.

If I contrast my mindset as an adolescent and my



daughter's, it's like the huge distance that exists between the Soviet Union and the United States. Sure she thinks about love, but not about marriage in the way I did--coveting a bridal gown and a big wedding party with an orchestra and champagne. She wants to find a companero to live with with whom she can share both personal and political goals--whether married or not. She said to me, "If a guy says he loves me, but doesn't really share my political ideas, it's not love." And now she plans to develop herself through a university education. She doesn't want to take the easy road to a good paying job but wants to teach others. She's convinced that to the degree that she develops her own capabilities, that's the degree to which everyone can aspire. At her age, I developed my skills just to advance my own individual life in an egotistical way. That's why I say that the difference between her and me at age 14 is like that separating the Soviet Union and the United States.

And also, when I was my daughter's age, I only thought about what dress I'd wear the next day, with what color shoes. Like most middle class adolescents here, I was wallowing in a kind of North American consumer mentality--thinking about what U.S. rock and roll record to buy--you know, Paul Anka, Elvis Presley, Bill Haley and the Comets. I didn't have any objectives.

When I started to work, all I wanted to do was bring in money, so I could buy things--the best bras, shoes, clothes, and makeup--Christian Dior. When I started to work here people called me "the bourgeoisie," because that's the mindset I had. Now, I'm ashamed to remember that, but it also makes me happy to be able to compare these two things: what it was to live in a world completely removed from reality and what it is to live with your feet on the ground in the middle of a revolutionary process.

When I was my daughter's age, I thought love was the greatest goal. Since then I've noticed that it isn't. I talk frankly with my daughter about birth control--just as openly as I do with you--and about what goes along with having a fiance and with just having fun. If I'd ever asked my parents about birth control, they'd have gotten angry and even gotten out the stick to hit me. My mother would have said that such questions meant I had no respect for them, that my mind must be in the gutter to be thinking about such things. In most families now, the mothers are speaking to their children about such things.

This year is like a prize which the revolution has granted me, letting me devote full time to working with the workers here. I've been freed from my other work responsibilities in the university to be general secretary of the union. I know that starting in August of next year, I've got to go back to my regular work. But this is a great privilege for me. You know, in the year and a half since the revolution, we've seen a complete change in education. Now it's prioritized, and since we workers help too, we are also prioritized. We don't have this problem of state neglect in the university anymore.

In my job here, I not only want to make contact with the union headquarters at each campus, I also want face-to-face contact with the members at the base, so as to listen to their problems and suggestions which we'll try to implement here. Really, we do not have work problems or conflicts between worker and boss because here in the university we had worked together in a consolidated way long before the revolution. Elsewhere secretaries and staff in offices still face work problems of the traditional sort, especially in the private sector. But our union here in the university works on educating the staff so as to raise their level of work discipline, and advance their political understanding, and continue their academic education. You know, many of our cleaning staff and gardeners do not have high educational achievement and now they can study beyond the literacy level at the Centers of Popular Education (CEP).

Furthermore, since there's no salary increases anywhere in the country, the union here is trying to make workers' real salaries go further. We've established a grocery store to sell basic grains at cost and a childcare center for the children of faculty and staff. We also want to inaugurate a popular dining room, with a sliding scale of prices according to a person's salary, and a popular pharmacy that would sell basic medicines at a taken price.

Already we have doctors assigned to us, paid by the Ministry of Health; and in the popular pharmacy we'd distribute some basic medicines manufactured here through our pharmacy school such as antibiotics, expectorants, and anti-allergic drugs, and other medicines donated from abroad. We'd charge a kind of symbolic price, like 25¢, so as to continue building up a fund to put toward other projects here.

Higher education has changed a lot since the revolution. Before July 19, the private schools, mostly Catholic ones, had a different curriculum and offered different majors, especially in areas like business administration. Since the triumph, the rectors of all the universities have joined together in the Council of Superior Education, which helps set the guidelines, the political principles, and the organization to follow in superior education nationally. In particular, the curriculum in all the universities is the same. That's a crucial change. Before, a Catholic university like UCA (University of Central America) would be maintained both by the state and by private initiative (80% private initiative). That's where industry prepared its cadre, who would act as its servants and help it increase future profits. Both the companies that supported the university and the teachers and students who attended it stuck to a kind of entrepreneurial mentality because they formed an elite character by a very high tuition--like 1500 cordobas every month.

Meanwhile, here at the National University (UNAN), even though it was in the middle of the dictatorship,

students paid 380 cordobas a semester. Now the revolution has reduced that to a symbolic fee of 68 cordobas a year, which would not even cover the paper or chalk used by the school. Next year, in addition, we'll see a strong unified block of university workers.

The majors offered now are those that have a use within a revolutionary system. Some kinds of occupations, those that just don't serve us anymore--were thrown out as university majors, especially business administration. We're training technicians, especially in the field of agriculture, because that's one thing most of our communities need. And we're training health workers since public health had been formerly totally neglected. And we're also emphasizing the pedagogical sciences, especially to educate preschool and gradeschool teachers.

A really transcendental project for us in the university is that called the "student assistants" program. Our most outstanding sophomores and juniors take on a double load. They continue to master the subject matter of their major but they start to prepare themselves for a career in education by learning pedagogy, evaluation techniques, and educational planning. We don't have an advanced graduate program

to prepare a university faculty, so, in a transcendental way, we have reorganized the university and challenged our best students to learn both their subject matter and how to present university classes. These students work with tutors who supervise their lesson plans, because, of course, the students can just teach classes anyway they like, according to however they interpret the material. Student assistants teach here in all the different fields--agriculture, humanities, journalism, psychology, social work, economics, natural sciences, and math. These revolutionary transformations in curriculum feel really weighty to our students, and the student assistants take their studies more seriously than students ever did here before.

Well, we in this union, we workers, don't just grapple with administrative problems. We take on those of the professors and students, too. We understand all these problems within their larger context and deal with them that way. We participated in the reorganization of higher education and in curriculum reform. For us this signifies one of the most important products of our revolution. It's this unity among us all that moves higher education forward.

Education and Media

Immediately after the triumph, the revolutionary government passed a law saying things couldn't be advertised on the basis of sex.

People here are addicted to the news. For example, in the morning I listen to radio news from 7 to 8. I especially like a show that pokes fun at local politicians. I read the Sandinista papers, La Barricada and El Nuevo Diario at work and then I buy the conservative paper, La Prensa, in the evening; you've gotta know what the enemy is up to.

I teach in a Catholic middle school. The few of us who are Sandinistas have to work pretty hard to have an effect. As far as I can tell, only our two clean-up campaigns in the neighborhood inspired any revolutionary unity here.

All around Managua's highways you'd see billboards with maybe a naked woman holding a bottle of whiskey in her hands. You know, those kinds of things exploited bourgeois women too.

Kids like disco. That's OK, they can have as much as they want of it, with all the records that come from the United States.

I'm sending my daughter to a Catholic school and I don't think it's fair to label the kids that go there "plastic."



LITERACY TEACHERS RETURNING FROM THE MOUNTAINS (1980).

Photo by Amina Luna and C.S.T. photographers.

New Construction of the Present

Gioconda Belli

I'm on the cutting edge of the construction of myself,
worried about cements, structures, solid walls
to protect the baggage of dreams I carry on my shoulders,
I require certainties and tranquil lanes,
firm steps towards my own familiar homeland.
This clay needs to take form, become brick.
I have accumulated times like colored baby blocks
and now the days ask me to structure their rhythm,
the cadence of my audacious awakenings,
the sound, the track of my steps.
The time for lone meditation has gone,
there are choirs where I may join my voice,
songs springing from thick throats,
inviting arms decoding the earth...

Every day new challenges are born
demanding answers.
In this present made
with so much blood,
we have to trace face contours with firmness,
we have to reinforce our arms,
tighten our muscles,
rush forth to conquer this ripe earth,
force the dawn to be born.

Again the skeptics and instigators,
again the baleful prophecies
we must show we have ceased
to be quicksand.

Work



WOMEN SORTING CARROTS IN A CANNING FACTORY

Photo by Amina Luna and C.S.T. photographers

We re-tooled this factory which was abandoned by its owners who took off for the United States. As you can see, most of us are women. What we need from the union is a day-care center. When we come to work we have to lock our kids in the house and leave them there alone all day.

Poor women have higher hopes for themselves now. When skills workshops are held in towns where a cooperative is going to be set up, women flock to them. Working in a cooperative adds a whole new social dimension to their lives in these small towns. Even though they still have to do most of the housework, they're getting economically involved with their entire community. Often the women's skills jump ahead so fast they're soon running the whole cooperative on their own.

In my neighborhood there's a big family with all women in it. They run a carpentry shop and can make any kind of furniture you ask for.

Three days a week, I pack pineapples in a factory. The other three days I do farm labor washing down pineapple trees. Factory work pays \$6 a day - farm labor only \$3, I'd like to move to the city where I could get full-time factory work, but I've got to stay here so my mother can look after my retarded child.

I like seeing these women traffic police, young and attractive in their uniforms, standing at street corners and directing cars. When they flag down some big macho driver, he will look so sheepish, because he knows that he cannot bribe his way out of the ticket. And the guys do not drive by making cat-calls or sexual comments because they know they will be fined for that, too.

Women Shouldn't Have to Work at This Job

Organizers for the Domestic Workers Union

MARIA AMANDA: I have this job because I know something about organizing -- I also work as a recruiter for the militias. One of the biggest problems this union faces is that women who work as maids are scattered throughout the city in separate houses. This is a major difference between domestic workers and any other kind of worker. It hinders the advancement of the women and their union.

ESMERALDA: The idea of maids having a union strikes terror in the hearts of employers; they fight hard against their maids' joining. That's why many companeras say, "Look, I don't want trouble with my employer - I can't join the union." And if the employers fear the maids joining the union, certainly they'd fear the maids' joining the militia even more! Just recently, when we were working in this neighborhood, the brother of a boss demanded to see our identification. When he realized we were from the union he wouldn't give his brother's maid permission to come out of the house!

Domestic workers often begin around age 14. Employers used to look for young girls because they were easily controlled and uneducated. Rich people from Managua would go back to their haciendas to get maids. A hacienda owner would say to a girl's parents, "Let her come work for me in Managua. She'll have all the advantages, and my family will treat her like a daughter."

MARIA AMANDA: A maid was often expected to give herself sexually to the adolescent boys in the

house so they wouldn't have to go to prostitutes. Isolated from her family and without protection, the woman faced a terrible dilemma -- submit or lose her job. Such abuse is rare now because an employer can end up in jail if he treats a domestic worker like that.

ESMERALDA: We have a national contract that sets the minimum wage for domestic workers at 400 cordobas a month and establishes a 10 hour work day. It's also suggested that maids get 800 cordobas if they do washing and cooking too. Maids have usually been paid 200 to 300 cordobas a month and have been forced to work as much as 15 hours a day. Employers still oppose the 10 hour day and often say, "Well, if you're only going to work 10 hours, you have to leave in the evening." Since many of the maids are farm women, they don't have any other place to go, so they work the 15 hours just to have a place to sleep.

MARIA AMANDA: Often a farm woman, pregnant and abandoned, comes to the city to look for work. She can find few jobs since she has no skills. By working as a maid, she at least has a roof over her children's head. That's why it's so important that women be free in the evenings to come to the literacy and job training classes we offer: so they don't have to spend their whole lives washing and ironing for somebody else.

ESMERALDA: Sometimes the women bring their children here because they have no place to leave them.



The kids play from 6 to 8 while their mothers study.

MARIA AMANDA: When we have union meetings, some women will come for 10 or 15 minutes. They've

told their employer a lie to get out of the house. They'll check in briefly, then leave. It's not unusual for an employer to fire a woman if he finds out she's involved in the union.

ESMERALDA: Our union hasn't been made official yet: we depend on AMLAE and the CST for a general orientation. What we need is our literature. We have AMLAE and CST posters, but we don't have our own posters to put up on CDS-bulletin boards around town. We don't have our own meeting place either, so we have to rent union halls and pay for them ourselves. Well, we can't take a day off from work to do that and we don't get big salaries. So we have parties and make and sell things to raise money; somehow we manage.

MARIA AMANDA: We'll consider our union successful when women no longer have to work as domestics.

Family Life

It can't just be that one sex is good for one job and another for other jobs. If that was true, I wouldn't bring home the salary that I do. Surely, it wouldn't take any essential quality away from my husband to help me do the dishes.

Proletarian men often have a different sense of family than middle class men who have been waited on by women all their lives. Boys in poor families often take care of their younger brothers and sisters while their mothers go out to work. Without a father around, the oldest boy would have to help a lot, even with things like cooking.

I was a market baby and was hit and pushed around a lot. Now when I go to give my little boy a slap, I have to stop myself and reflect. That's the only way we can break these habits that follow us from the past.

Sunday Drowsiness

Cristian Santos

Saturday, day and night
I washed plates, saucers,
I cleaned floors
and clothes. I...I don't know.
Today, Sunday
at dawn, the children
have already been here,
the floor dirty
saucers and washrags too,
lunch to make
and a Sunday drowsiness
irresistably overcomes
my arms, legs and feet.
Let them wait,
the saucers, the rags
and lunch too.

If you're middle class, it's hard to get along. My two babies have bronchitis and last week I had to spend over \$100 for the doctor and antibiotics.

Childcare and housework aren't hindering women's involvement in the revolution. Oh, unmarried women will always have more free time, but thousands of mothers, even poor women who can't afford childcare, are involved in their block committees, the women's organization, the militia and their union.

Everyone wants a television set, even the poorest family, especially here in Managua. Families are usually paying off two things on installment plans - a TV set and a big room fan.

I said to my parents in 1968, "The only way things will change is by fighting." They said, "These things just aren't for women." I replied, "No, they're killing everyone -- men, women, babies, old people. We women feel the repression just as heavily as men. And mothers feel it even more."



Children

Before the revolution, children had to do exactly as their parents said. Their father's authority controlled their lives.

Poor boys about 12 years old just ran around before, smoking marijuana and playing pool. Now, anyone smoking marijuana goes to jail and you don't see those cheeky impudent gangs of boys hanging around every street corner.

When my mother went out to work all day, she would lock us up in the house by ourselves. That made me really furious!

I look around and see barefoot kids selling newspapers on the highway and people living in shacks. When I see that's gone, then I can say, "Well, now I deserve a rest."

Some children soldiers who grew up on the barricades became adults there and stayed in the army. Others went back to school and, of course, their thinking is more revolutionary than kids who didn't fight. We have a huge problem here with rich kids who often oppose the revolution because they spent the war abroad or in well-protected mansions or plantations.

Those of us who were a little better off bought up canned goods to prepare for the insurrection. But when the fighting came, poor children often went for 4 or 5 days without anything to eat.



Marriage



One of my daughters, who was recently married and is pregnant now, likes the idea of revolution, but she doesn't want to get mixed up in it. She's pretty much a comfort-seeker.

I have boyfriends that take me to the movies and to dinner, but I don't see marriage as a necessity.

I was married when I was 17. I didn't know whether or not I loved him. He was the man and he wanted to get married, so that was that. I did know that I was never really enthused about married life. He didn't want me to go see my mother or study or have friends come to the house. He didn't even want me to talk to my brothers and sisters!

Even now, a woman loses points if she is not married. At least, she's expected to have a man. Many parents will say to their daughter, "Listen, you're 24. How come you're not married?"

A Teacher and an Artist

Maria-Luisa Bermudez Amina Luna

Interview with Maria-Luisa Bermudez, grade school principal, and her daughter Amina Luna, photographer with the Sandinista labor union (CST) newspaper, *El Trabajador* (*The Worker*) and super-8 filmmaker making films for the CST.

Maria-Luisa: Since I was a very little girl, I wanted to be a teacher because my father was a teacher and ran a little school right in our house. But my parents didn't want me to. My father said, "No. I'd prefer you become a seamstress because a seamstress will always earn more than a teacher. As a teacher, you can work yourself to death and still die from hunger. Or study pharmacy or accounting for a more lucrative salary. I lived constantly repenting that I decided to be a teacher--not from dissatisfaction with my work or the contribution I've made to the community. But you all have nothing as a result of that, because my salary is so miserable. Surely I've cooperated with and worked for others, but my family should have the right to some kind of satisfaction as a result of my work, too."

I studied private accounting but never enjoyed it. I was always fascinated with being a teacher. When I got married, I insisted that I ought to keep on either working or studying accounting in an advanced course. But I didn't continue accounting, and anyway my husband never agreed with me. But he also could never maintain me and my children economically.

I took advantage of our economic need to continue studying. At first my husband said that the kids would just be left with nobody to look after them, but I really did demand that he take care of them at night. Well, it took a lot of courage to go out at night and leave the kids there. I resigned myself to losing him but knew that as a working woman I'd have some small capacity to get along without him. Here in Nicaragua, almost always the responsibility for the whole family falls on the mother.

Amina: My mother had never worked before but she had studied through the third year of secondary school and had good grades. This represented a lot of education for a woman then and she was able to get a position teaching in a rural school. She continued studying until she graduated as a school teacher, but it cost us all a lot.



As my mother was working and studying, she didn't have anybody to take care of us. She asked a neighbor to take care of my younger sister, and she took me at age 4 to school with her every day. We had to walk a real long way to get there, along a dirty pathway. Sometimes she'd haul me in a wheelbarrow; sometimes we got soaked. And since she had to take care of me while she was teaching, I had to be even better behaved. We'd walk so far back home and get home very late at night. We did that every single day.

In the beginning, when my mother was still married, when we both got back so late at night, my father would start yelling and hit her, saying she wanted to go out to work so she could do bad things like run around with men. He must have been raised in a terrible macho way, thinking he did not have to do anything around the house and that my mother's only role was to serve her husband--down to bringing him a hot lunch wherever he was working. He left us when we were still little and my mother was very young (she'd



AMINA LUNA

had me at age 16 and my sister at 17), and she had to work very hard just to get along. He went to the U.S. and never sent us even the smallest stipend. It was like he had no children at all.

Maria-Luisa: I was a rural teacher for five years. The government neglected us and even the students didn't care much about school. You can hardly imagine what the new attitude here toward health care has meant for those schools. Now we consider education about good health basic and that sick children have little capacity to learn. We teachers, for example, report and get care for children who may have parasites or malaria.

Traditionally, the rural people were taken advantage of by herbalists or witch-healers, who used what they know about town gossip to make a profit. If they saw that somebody had a little piece of land, they'd take that person's money to effect a cure, or they'd promise to protect the person from any bad spirit that lived in the house. They'd claim another person, for jealousy, had given you this disease. Now these "healers" are being challenged by a higher social organization or by a teacher, so the people

are beginning to understand that if they have diseases, they should go to a health center, where they'll get better.

Also in these areas, people have plenty of food but they often don't know about nutrition--either how to cook certain things or to use certain foods. They do not know how to take advantage of all the things they have. The rural school teacher has to teach them.

Some teachers have ability in sewing and cooking, and they teach all that in the community, too. I'd often go to someone's house and teach them to make things to beautify their house--to make little adornments--and also about house cleaning and washing clothes. They really had no tradition about doing those things well. At the same time, I'd go out in the fields with them to learn things like cutting coffee or sowing beans or growing rice.

Amina: It's important to us to spend Sundays going out to the harvests where we're needed. The government does not demand it of us, but we understand our responsibility here and our connection to the rural people. If torrential rains are falling, and plantation owners want the revolution to fail and would give up their profits and let their harvest rot, well we can look around and see what the people's need is--that our country needs those exports. Such extra work comes up only at certain times of the year, and even our leaders do it. Of course, after cutting coffee on a Sunday, we're all exhausted the next week.

Before this, cutting coffee was considered denigrating. A student capable of cutting coffee would not descend to that task. It was like a job for a black man, a slave. And people--middle class people and city people--thought farmers were like animals who didn't have rights to anything. The migrant farm workers who brought in the big export crops were well off if they could sleep in a hut. Have you ever been to a migrant worker camp? Once I went to one to take a census, and it really caused me a lot of grief. The huts are worse than chicken coops--filthy, filthy, with everyone sleeping all squashed together. Those conditions wouldn't even be good for animals. The huts were infested with every kind of bug--fleas, bedbugs, who knows what else--and people coming back from cutting cotton or coffee would have skin infections and be all blotched with bites. Who knows what kind of diseases they picked up? Nevertheless, the sleeping conditions and the food have improved now on those haciendas. It's regulated by law now, just as pay is. And now university students go out to cut coffee, and so do teachers and workers. In fact, most people are going.

Maria-Luisa: Right now I'm principal of a secondary school in a very poor neighborhood and am also a sophomore in the university, studying pedagogy at night school. Studying pedagogy and relearning Nicaraguan history are wonderfully exciting--since they are, for the first time, firmly grounded in Nicaraguan reality. Our revolutionary government wants to create educational programs that conform to the reality we are living. Sometimes this means tending first to the physical plant of the schools. Because

there were no desks, kids used to attend class standing or sitting on the floor, or in many cases, sitting on bare ground in the dust. In the poorest areas, the government is also helping out with notebooks for students or maybe a glass of milk.

More important, we teachers are newly learning things so that we can teach reality. Our country's history, for example, was completely distorted, but that's the way we had learned it and had to teach it. We're correcting all that.

Furthermore, we're teaching children for the first time about their own real capacities and how to develop themselves as whole, full persons. In these poor neighborhoods, people really understand that the revolution was made for the poor--that there'll be equality and a roof over people's heads and good kinds of entertainment, because people don't just need to work but need to have opportunities for entertainment and education and living socially.

To do this, we need people to prepare themselves and study and work--and do it with joy and enthusiasm. Because when we have enthusiasm, we do things better and excel, which then gives people the capacity to do things even better in the future. This country's projects will achieve success to the degree that we accomplish the tasks which have been entrusted to us. Logically, we can't wait around for the finished revolution to happen; we're not just going to sit still in our houses waiting for the revolution to come to us. Sure, the revolution was made for poor people, but we all have to work.

We're teaching students that work elevates and ennobles people, not that work is a punishment, as poor people used to say before. They also believed that those born poor had to die poor, and that those born rich acquired a certain kind of unarguable privilege at birth. Now, the families in my school district understand that all children have the capacity to excel, and that people ought to live on the basis of real ideals.

We're teaching about this realistically. We know that many of our people's capacities have yet to be developed. The revolution says that the workers and the peasants have taken power, but it's not exactly those people who are going to govern because they don't have the capacity for it yet. They have to have representatives now. To the degree that poor people get the skills for it, they'll truly represent their own voice in this country. In the future, it will be them. For that reason, they're the ones that have to study more every day and elevate production and participate in all revolutionary tasks.

In the neighborhood where I teach, the children are very poor and have suffered a lot, especially during the insurrection. Most of our students have never used shoes. Sometimes when we hear of a child playing hookey and then visit that family, the mother will say, "I can't send her to school because I don't have any clothes for her." A lot of our children eat only once a day, and they often come to school without breakfast. Maybe a neighbor lady sends them off to school, or they just have to get there on their own because the mothers have left early to find work washing and ironing in someone's house or go to the markets looking for something to sell. Maybe there are 10 or 11 kids. Maybe the mother has left them something to eat on the stove, maybe not.

During the insurrection, those children suffered the most. Their neighborhoods faced a lot of repres-



sion. When the insurrection came, the houses had no water or electricity. Sometimes these children spent four or five days without anything to eat. In poor areas, people couldn't prepare for the war because they didn't have any money to buy things; a lot of us knew the fighting was coming, and we bought what we could, but they couldn't. They had to flee and take shelter wherever they could.

Because so many of these children lived on the streets, almost abandoned by their parents, they imitated the older kids and played ball, drank, and ran around as vagrants. They didn't understand many things, certainly not the concept of fulfilling work.

But now these children feel really good about school. We have almost no discipline problems. Surely some children unaccustomed to school want to get up and walk around whenever they feel like it. But in these cases the teacher can sit down and have a little affectionate talk with such students, and they'll really respond. They feel such a great lack of affection. If a teacher shows just a little concern, the students feel happy and adore the teacher. Teachers can really work with these kids.

The directors of each school have to take a census to see how many children live in that neighborhood. Legally, every child must attend school. We go from house to house to talk to parents about sending their children to school. We make parents see the necessity of that. Most really do understand this, because even if we don't go to their houses, the children come to school. We still go to every house so as to understand how people are living, what they eat, what kind of assistance the government might give them. We're planning a lot of projects which we haven't

been able to accomplish yet, and we're doing the census now to determine what people and what families will get what kind of aid. Already children are getting economic aid from the state when older children maintain a household and have to support their younger brothers and sisters. Well, those children are receiving economic aid, and all of them are then obliged to go to school. We teachers and the people doing revolutionary vigilance in the CDS also keep an eye out on what's going on out on the streets so as to end vagrancy among kids.

In my own family, we truly are forming the children to be a new kind of person, with a mindset that can accept radical social and personal change. For example, my first husband would help with the housework only if I were sick for a week, but then he'd sort of disappear. He was capable of doing housework but didn't exert any effort at it. Now I teach my children and grandchildren that we all have to work to make the house a nice place to live in. And when I ask them to do something around the house, they don't come back by saying, "That's a boy's task or a girl's task."

Because they know that the women here are really busy, they can and do run the whole house--doing the shopping, cleaning, washing, sweeping and sprinkling the patio, or taking care of the little ones. They look around the house and see what we need and then all the tasks are taken on indiscriminately by the boys and girls. I give them money and they keep track of what we should spend. And they know how to make a shopping list in advance so they don't have to go back to the store for something else later. When my son gets married, he'll know exactly what's needed to run a house because we're educating our boy children the same as our girls.

My children really understand these things. In turn they'll teach their own children to develop non-sexist habits from the time of birth on--because we know people do things badly or well out of habit. We teachers especially have undertaken this huge task: to cut off once and for all those bad habits that have come from machismo. We're teaching children that they have to act more brotherly and sisterly together, more just. That's the only way we can all live happier.

Children have more independence now. Before, kids had to do exactly what their parents said. Their life was completely organized in terms of parents' authority. Now that's changed. We give children more liberty and see them as unique persons whose opinions we must respect. We still give them orientation. We give them freedom with certain limits. And children themselves, both boys and girls, claim their own rights.

For example, my daughter, age 14, works with the Sandinista Youth and so spends almost all her time in school or with this organization. And for me, as for most parents, this is not so convenient, because she had helped out more with the tasks around the house. If she helps but not as much, we have to do more work. Before, when children, especially girls, came home, they just used to set about doing housework. And now children have to go to some meeting or some mass demonstration or they have a little party. You have to give them permission; they really want to go.

It's been hard for some parents to learn that children have to have their own criteria for acting and form their own opinions, so that they can learn how to act as adults. Because it's only to the degree that people enact something, that they try

something out, that they learn. We have to teach children how to be adults, so that when they get to age 18, they won't still be acting with their parents' ideas. We want our children to think for themselves, because we know they can learn to formulate for themselves what's good and what's bad. When they can do that, the children themselves can decide what road to take. Because when you know what's truly good, that's what you've got to choose.

Recently, I told my daughter, "I'm not going to let you go to a meeting tonight because you've been staying out too late." She replied, "Look, mother, I'm not going because I *want* to. But I'm responsible not just for myself, but for everyone in that study group. I'm supposed to lead it, and if I don't arrive the study circle won't go on. I understand why you're saying you don't want me to go, but I think now that I've explained it to you, you won't oppose me any more." She was right. I enjoy seeing my daughter become a responsible leader--that's what we wanted to see our kids grow up to be, responsible people.

Amina: I've become really committed to becoming a revolutionary artist. In reality, I've had no formal instruction in photography but have learned how to do lab work from my two compañeros working with me at the CST. We save all our negatives here and are creating a workers' history, and we're also trying to create a real workers' cinema, a class conscious cinema, in super-8. I'm confident that I can progress technically, because every day I spend in the lab I'm developing better pictures in less time. You know, if I could get my own enlarger, I could set up a little business taking school pictures, and then apply myself more conscientiously to exploring photography's potential as a revolutionary art.

In a sense, I'm following in the tradition of my grandmother, who was Nicaragua's only woman photographer in her day. She'd been married to a photographer, and when he died, all she was left was his studio. She looked around wondering how to operate the cameras or develop film. She'd never done any of that. When she was left alone, she mused, "What am I going to be doing with four kids and this workshop? Well, I'll begin practicing." She thought maybe she should take the studio's sign down, but people kept coming to collect back orders. She wasted a lot of expensive photographic paper practicing, hoping some pictures would turn out. Some of her husband's friends saw what she was trying to do and spent about five days training her. She finally learned it, and her photographic studio became one of the best.

She'd go to parties and big palacial residences to take pictures, and she entered into all kinds of places. It cost her a lot to adapt to being around those people and their vulgar conversation; furthermore, she'd go wherever it was necessary to go to take good pictures and had to climb around a lot of dirty, awkward places wearing a skirt.

Now there are more women photographers in Nicaragua. Sometimes we see them taking school pictures, and they only charge a little bit for each picture. It's really mainly women who do this kind of photographic work. I feel confident I can continue in my artistic vocation because now women are getting jobs in mass communications equal to men's and at the same rank. There are women radio and TV announcers and women printers in the newspapers, too.

Maria-Luisa: Before the revolution, when Amina wanted to study for a technical career in radio-TV, they said to her, no--why do you want to do a man's job? Now we're throwing out that tradition and little by little opening up all kinds of jobs for men and women indiscriminately. You see a lot of women police here, who are treated with a lot of respect, and we now have women bus drivers, which at first caused a lot of surprise. Before you didn't ever see that kind of thing. Women didn't dare do something like that. Everyone from childhood on had been

taught what work was "appropriate" for men and women to do.

Amina: Our revolutionary government insists that women no longer be treated like that. Now we're given the real place in society we deserve. One of the first things the comandantes proclaimed was that with our participation in the revolution, we women had earned every right. We'd fought the same as men, we'd paid a really high price, so we couldn't keep going on under the same conditions. We've been vindicated in the new state.

Rural Life



Nothing's changed - things are the same as they always were. We work as hard as ever - long hours in the field. The work breaks your back and the money's miserable.

What do you mean, "Nothing's changed."? Look at this day care center. Have you forgotten when the babies were left all day in the sun by the side of the cane rows and how they were covered with mosquito bites? Have you forgotten how many died of malnutrition? And when have we ever had decent housing like this and water you could drink without getting sick? Everything has changed -- and for the better!

My aunts and cousins in the countryside have become very active in the revolution. They're doing things they've never done before. They stand up and make speeches. They talk about themselves as women and say they should no longer be marginalized but should work alongside men as equals.

People used to say, "Only slaves or farmers cut coffee." The rich thought of farmers as animals. Migrant workers were lucky if they could get a hut to sleep in, even though it would be filled with fleas, bedbugs, and ticks. Otherwise, they slept squashed together in a tiny area, filthier than a chicken coop.

I come from a farming community and I see that men's ideas about what women can do have really changed.

I'm in charge of secondary school construction in the county. The farmer who assists me rides his bike around the county collecting a dollar from each family for the building fund. Each family is also supposed to be contributing labor but they say, "We're sending our family to cut coffee on Saturday and Sunday to make more money." I reply, "Well you can go harvest on Saturday and come build on Sunday." The Sandinista government donated the land and building materials but if the school isn't built in 3 months they'll take it back and give it to someone else. I want the school built as soon as possible. I spend \$1 a day now on buses to send my three oldest children to high school.



DORA -- MARKET VENDOR, POET, SOPRANO, CHURCH LEADER, SANDINISTA ACTIVIST, FARMER, AND IN CHARGE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION IN HER COUNTY

Stampede

Indiana Cardenal

The tyrant is no more
 The Lake of Managua is dry
 I don't have tears to cry
 for my dead.
 My canals closed from pain
 The dust of my land
 penetrates my pores
 to the bone.
 I am with you, peon, worker
 peasant loving the soil
 you cultivate.
 It belongs to you, it's yours
 it's your conquest.
 The tyrant is no more.

Ars Poetica

Cristian Santos

It is the hour of silence,
 a silence that lets us
 hear the smoothness
 with which the wind moves
 the Tempisque leaves
 and the nocturnal crickets,
 the time, too, sister
 to listen to our thoughts
 with clarity.

Men

Our men suffered horribly -- in jail, on the run, spied on or hiding all day. They're not thick-headed. They know that the participation of the whole family strengthens the revolution.

A lot of opportunists picked up a rock as the Sandinistas were winning and said, "I'm a revolutionary." They're doing all too well now. My son-in-law was a combatant in the heaviest fighting and stayed in the army. But he has never gotten the recognition he deserves. Now, he's stuck in a desk job.



Photo from NICARÁUAC

My husband says he's a Marxist, but he still spends his salary on \$100 Jordache jeans.

Men don't like to wash clothes or do dishes. Usually you can just get them to sweep and make the bed. If they get to the point of babysitting, only a few rare souls among them will change diapers. I think they're learning.

Men often go out to cafes at night, women rarely do. So if male homosexuals are getting together, women don't usually see or know about it.

He never ran around with women, but he drank a lot. That's what killed him. He was jolly when he was drunk, but he spent all our money that way. Off the bottle he was depressed and morose. Still, I miss him.

Machismo? That's when a man hits a woman because she wants to leave the house at night to do political work.

Dionisio, Compañero

Daisy Zamora

We are closer to ourselves
now
Closer than when overwhelmed with objects
we moved among all those people
always foreigners.

We nourished to life
words no one mentioned.
Nothing without sustenance is said now.
I can no longer write you mild poems
shaded by the acacias
or willows in the yard.
I no longer have a window to see the sun
setting the gentians on fire.

Our life is something else now. That life
of which we always spoke
To which we were coming little by little...

Now we are ourselves
with thousands and thousands of our own.

Sexuality

I'm rooming with a family now. They care for and trust me. I can say, "I'm going to be out late," or, "I'm going to the seashore to relax." No matter what hour I come in, they don't ask me where I've been. Before the revolution women had to live in a more traditional way, living with parents, not travelling much or going to places like discos. But even though we are free and independent, we are not libertines.

I don't know anybody who is a homosexual.

My lover and I are both eighteen. I'm pregnant and I don't want to lose this baby, so I gave up my job. I've already had one miscarriage. After the baby's born, we'll live with his family so his mother can take care of the baby while I go back to work.

Men say they want as many babies as God sends. But really, they just do not want to use condoms. They think it poisons their blood.

I wouldn't be afraid to fall in love with a conservative man. It's our job to raise people's consciousness; so I'd work on convincing him.

Abortion is definitely illegal. But how could a doctor prove an abortion was provoked?

Rape is a terrible memory for us here. The Guardia did the raping. Like in El Salvador now, they deliberately used rape to oppress us. We can't let ourselves forget what happened. We have to keep our consciousness high about what we fought for.

Thunderclaps and Rainbows

Gioconda Belli

I will start by dreaming once more of our Moon,
of the planet Earth
of a very definite place
of the navel of a large continent,
and I will start to tell you
about the sun between the trees,
about the heat, about the jungles,
the song of the birds,
and the lovely voices of the people.
I'll make you songs with thunderclaps,
I'll tell you about calloused hands,
about the war, about the Triumph,
about what it cost us, what we suffered,
what we now enjoy, work for, do.

I'll feel the sharp nostalgia for the damp land,
I'll think of things I've stopped doing
getting wrapped up in dreams, coming to know planets.
And we'll go along together
gaining from the stars' conjunction.

You'll tell me I was right
that this place is beautiful,
my volcanoes hung over the countryside
like a woman with dissheveled breasts,
the lakes, the flags, the smiles...
and you'll say:
Work, woman, work,
let's work,
so the dream is right here,
in this very place.

Radio and TV shows used to promote family planning before the war. Now you don't hear anything about it. But women must be doing something because, in my neighborhood, the babies are coming really well-spaced apart.

I've travelled to France and Mexico and seen open gay cultures, but homosexuality is just not visible here. It's not something that people talk about.

I, the Woman of Clay

Rosario Murillo

Formed and guarded for centuries and centuries,
I am the headless fury of time
a face without features
the end of loves without mirrors
I live and have lived alive in the clay
through the rivers and seasons
geological strata and eruptions
countless cultures that don't die
and those just beginning
in the midst of all the noise
I, woman...

Prostitution

Director of Rehabilitation Center

In August, 1979, prostitution was declared illegal and the brothels closed. The mass organizations and especially AMLAE tried to get prostitutes into other work but women would often take the new job and continue to work at the old. With about 120 U.S. sailors coming through this port city every week and paying in dollars, a prostitute can earn in one week what a worker earns in a month. When a woman decides on her own to give up prostitution as a job, it means she's developed an entirely new value system. And so our work has a lot to do with developing both prostitutes' and the community's consciousness.

Police are not yet enforcing the law forbidding prostitution. First of all, given current conditions, it would be inhuman to keep a woman in the jail here more than two or three days. All we can do in our rehabilitation center is encourage women to join us, learn new skills, and integrate themselves into society because in future years the law will be enforced. Sometimes a 17 or 18 year old prostitute will be arrested for a fight or robbery and then sent to us. If we agree to take responsibility for her, she lives the same way here as everyone else does, with Saturdays free, as she does her time. We want no prison environment. If women do not come voluntarily, the project can't work.

We teach both skills courses and literacy. We also have day-long seminars about women's lives



DIRECTOR OF CORINTO CENTER



MEMBERS OF CORINTO CENTER

and worth. Women discover that by learning a new skill they create a new mentality for themselves. They also study about venereal diseases and receive medical exams along with that study. We also teach a lot about household budgeting, because when these women work, they won't be able to afford maids and childcare and cooks like they could before. They have to organize their lives, so as to live on a smaller income and make their money stretch. This means a great personal change.

Because of the economic conditions which prevail in Nicaragua and especially the economic problems which a mother with children has, we know that we have to offer an immediate economic solution to these women's needs. The German Conference of Catholic Bishops has funded us to provide each woman a basic salary of 1,000 cordobas a month while she's in the center, while the Ministry of Social Welfare offers an additional scholarship for gas and light bills. In addition, everybody in this project receives basic grains, such as rice and beans. In all, this really only represents a small beginning, since we can just take care of about 40 women at a time in a 6 month training program.

We're also trying to move into the "men's world" in Corinto to teach everyone about women's work. Discussions are being conducted in labor unions, among the police, in industry and at militia training. We want people to absorb these issues in their consciousness, in an interior act, and to analyze the problem of prostitution within a broader perspective --

that of women's oppression. We talk about history, looking at women's roles, and show how women were clearly exploited, especially in a sexual sense. Furthermore, CDS groups work with men to create a sense of moral shame since everyone in a CDS would know who's working as a prostitute, men are criticized if seen going in and out of prostitutes' houses. In this way, we've pushed a process of consciousness raising in male environments, as well as among Corinto's general population. We can see our success in the fact that in any public event or project here, our house is always officially represented.

A lot of farm women who came here to be waitresses and maids have ended up as prostitutes. We talk to them about their lives and what they'd like to do. Seeing their children's future in concrete terms affects these women tremendously. Their children attend school in the Center and face no prejudice in the community. These children are our major tool in convincing mothers to change.

About twenty women here have completely surpassed their previous condition and have assumed positions of major responsibility in the Center. This is an experimental program and will extend to Leon and Managua. Some of the women here could take on the responsibility of starting programs, but we insist that wherever they go, there'll be a team of community people especially women, to work with them. These other women must be under-

standing and disposed to accept prostitutes as "normal," as we put it, because there's nothing strange about us. If this kind of support group doesn't exist, prostitutes cannot advance. To produce a change in prostitutes the community has to change too.

I wanted to rise above where I was before, but I would never have done so if this program hadn't been here. It gave me concrete help and a new orientation -- so that I could imagine possibilities for change.

Revolutionary Attitudes

In this neighborhood, some women have such short memories. Before, they'd have to save money to bribe the Guardia so they could buy back their children's lives. Now these women can only think about shortages of bread and sugar. Their stomachs talk louder than their heads. But really, you can't blame them. They saw their children die, and now they want more than they had before.

You know, people had a terrible fear of the Guardia. So after the triumph, the Sandinista troops went into all the different neighborhoods giving parties to show everyone and especially all the children that it wasn't the same old Guardia.

When I went to my husband's funeral, someone broke into my house and stole all my clothes. That wouldn't have happened if our neighborhood had an active CDS.

My greatest dream is to be an authentic revolutionary woman.

Compañera

Vidaluz Meneses

Throw off your chains with firmness
and their deafening fall
will not make you tremble.
You are going to the meeting
with your infinite personal destiny.
Make your name yours
and plant it like a flag
in conquered territory.
Now nothing can stop you.
Now you yourself recognize
your own path.
Mistress of your road.
Conscious of the portion of history
that belongs to you, Compañera.

Notes for Angela

Vidaluz Meneses

On this long and elusive Sunday afternoon
I write to you
I like to think of you spending this time
revising a telex or monitoring
waiting on every word
that threatens our Revolution.
Or have you had some free time
and have you looked for an apartment
for when you return to your children.
In the time of finding yourself alone
I hope you'll have the strength we shared
when we decided, each woman in her own time--
to be unlike Lot's wife, attached to the past,
but to leave everything we couldn't take with us
and continue with pain and with love
along the road of history.

We feel tranquil. We made a revolution and
threw out that genocidal regime. Above all we love
the revolution and want it to flourish.

Women in Arms



MILITIA MEMBER

Photo by Amina Luna and C.S.T. photographers

Reflections on My Feet

Daisy Zamora

I have my father's feet
thin, long, pale feet with blue veins
bony men's feet
different from my sisters'
round, soft,
 slight women's feet.

I see my feet narrow as spatulas
wearing socks and schoolgirl shoes
trafficking corridors, noisy classes and breaks.
wearing stockings, fine sandals, patent leather, suede,
and my first dance slippers.

These feet have left some traces
in the combat zone
 some footprints
in the steep streets that rise and fall in Tegucigalpa
dark at night or deserted at dawn;
in the ever humid, rainy streets of San Jose
 at the change of the stoplight
in the hatchway of the underground Radio Sandino
in the buses, the streetstands, the foodstalls, the markets,
the security houses,
 in the underground hospital.
My feet with moccasins,
tennis shoes and boots
 splashing through puddles
with bluejeans, a shirt and eternally damp hair
--exile is a wet and cold-ridden memory...

I see these feet now walking freely
with sandals, heels or militia boots.
They walk through offices, outposts, ministries,
they visit art schools, workshops, libraries
and cultural centers in Ocotal, Camoapa, Matagalpa, San Carlos,
Bluefields, Puerto Cabezas, Siuna and other places.

I feel more a woman when I am in my
uniform carrying my rifle. This is a
women's revolution. We want to defend it.

My instep bone comes from my grandfather
and I don't know how far I will walk
the bottoms of my feet planted in our land,
this land for everyone given to everyone
so we can build with it
the future of everyone.

participate actively in unions, the militia, block committees, the church, and AMLAE. Sandinista mothers often sacrifice time with their families in order to build a future for their children, and many children also participate in the same areas as their parents. But what about children who do not? Won't these children someday be saying, "Where were you when I needed you?" and establishing their own privatized families in reaction when they marry?

Carole: I am anxious to get feedback about this publication. The women in the

rehabilitation center at Corinto were justly cautious about giving interviews. Many foreigners had visited them with a voyeuristic interest in the rehabilitation of prostitutes, but the Corinto women said nothing had ever come of all the interviews they'd given. In a sense, we have taken on a double task--to represent the Nicaraguan women fairly and to communicate the Nicaraguan experience to our readers in terms which are culturally understandable here. We hope the Nicaraguan women's revolutionary voice comes through clearly across translation and cultural difference.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Publications that regularly publish information about Nicaragua are the following:

The Guardian: The Independent Radical Newsweekly,
33 E. 17th St., NYC, NY 10011;

NACLA: Report on the Americas, 151 W. 19th St., NYC,
NY 10011.

JUMP CUT: A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CINEMA regularly features articles on films from the Third World and on films used in solidarity work. Of particular interest is a round-up article describing the documentaries available on the Nicaraguan revolution and reconstruction,

"For Our Urgent Use: Films on Central America," by Julia Lesage in issue no. 27 (1983).

Teaching materials related to the subject of Nicaraguan women that we find most useful are the film by Helena Solberg-Ladd and the International Women's Film Project, **FROM THE ASHES: NICARAGUA TODAY**, distributed by Document Associates, 211 E. 43rd St., NYC, NY 10017; the book of interviews with Sandinista women by Margaret Randall, Sandinista's Daughters, edited by Linda Yano, Toronto and Vancouver: New Star Books, 1981; and our own slide show, based on the interviews in this magazine (see ad below).



Revolutionary Mothers

A SLIDE SHOW ON WOMEN AND DAILY LIFE
IN NICARAGUA

BY JULIA LESAGE AND CAROLE ISAACS

Sound track with translations from interviews with Nicaraguan women and Nicaraguan music and images of daily life at home and at work. Accompanied by speaker. Available in video in winter 1983-84.

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a movie star in the
White House
are you ready for
a radical film magazine?*

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